

Edwin Arlington Robinson

Edwin Arlington Robinson, born in the village of Head Tide, Alna, Maine, on December 22, 1869, was the third son of Edward and Mary Robinson.

The following year the family moved to a large, comfortable home in Gardiner. Robinson, a shy, quiet child, attended Mrs. Morrell’s private school until the age of eleven when he entered Gardiner public schools. He became interested in poetry at a young age. He self-published *The Torrent and the Night Before* in 1896 and sent it to reviewers and friends. It received positive reviews, and Robinson soon published his second book, *The Children of the Night*. Late in 1897, he moved to New York, escaping the judgments of his neighbors and the demise of his family fortunes. In New York he published little at first and depended on the financial support of friends to give him time to write. In 1904 his luck changed. Kermit Roosevelt, son of President Theodore Roosevelt, introduced his father to Robinson’s work. The president persuaded a publisher to reprint *The Children of the Night*, wrote a review of it, and found a sinecure for Robinson at the U.S. Customs House. When Robinson published *The Town Down the River* in 1910, it was dedicated to the President. He was invited to the MacDowell Colony in 1922 and continued to spend summers there until his death. He received his first Pulitzer Prize in 1922 for *Collected Poems*, his second for *The Man Who Died Twice* in 1925, and a third for *Tristram* in 1928. Robinson published twenty-eight books of poetry in his lifetime. He remains best known for his “Tilbury Town” poems.

Portrait of Edwin Arlington Robinson by Lilla Cabot Perry, 1916. Courtesy of Colby College Special Collections, Waterville, Maine.



1. The E. A. Robinson House

67 Lincoln Avenue

The Robinson house, a National Historic Landmark, was built prior to 1856 by S. W. Bates. In 1870, Edward Robinson with his wife, Mary, and sons Dean, Herman, and infant Win settled into the house. It was cheerful and cultivated with a good library. Young Win was fascinated by sounds and rhythms of words. He would recite memorized verses to the astonishment of his family. His destiny was established at a very early age. He had a normal boyhood, swimming in the river, playing ice hockey, picking apples, and sneaking cigarettes. However, the decade of the 1890s was decidedly painful. In 1892 his father died. In the recession of 1893 the Robinson family lost most of its money, and his brother Herman began drinking heavily. In 1896 his beloved mother died. At age twenty-seven he left Gardiner and moved to New York in 1897. He returned for visits with friends and family, but he never again lived in the Lincoln Avenue house.



1. The Robinson House

2. The Robinson Family Burial Site

Oak Grove Cemetery, Danforth Street

Edwin Arlington Robinson died of pancreatic cancer at New York Hospital on April 6, 1935. His body was cremated, and his ashes are buried here with the other members of the Robinson family.

3. The Robinson Monument

Gardiner Common

This granite tablet was erected in 1936 as a tribute to Gardiner’s famous poet. After Robinson’s death, Laura E. Richards, E.A.R.’s friend, mentor and a Pulitzer Prize winner herself, launched a campaign to erect this memorial. She was in her eighties, but through her persistence, sums of money came in from all across the country. The tablet was designed by Boston architect, Henry R. Shepley. Laura Richards wrote the inscription and Herman Hagedorn, Robinson’s biographer, was the keynote speaker.



3. Robinson Monument

4. Mrs. William Morrell’s School

83 Dresden Avenue

Edward Robinson sent Win to private school when he was about five or six. He made friends with the Swanton brothers and Mrs. Morrell’s son, Harry. Harry Morrell’s death from diphtheria at the age of twelve had a profound effect on the budding poet. He stayed at Mrs. Morrell’s until he was eleven. About the time he began to write poetry, his father decided it was time for him to attend public school. Unfortunately, a teacher, annoyed by his “dreaminess,” hit him with the edge of her hand beneath his ear. He suffered intense earaches for the rest of his life.

5. The Captain Israel Jordan House

74 Lincoln Avenue

This was the home of Captain Israel Jordan and his wife, Lydia Farnsworth Jordan, and their two children, Augustus (Gus) and Alice, both older than Win. According to Robinson’s biographer, Hermann Hagedorn, the Jordan home was a refuge for the future poet. The three children enjoyed a “word hunting” game of sharing newly discovered words. In 1885 when Win was about sixteen, Captain Jordan and the crew of the ship *Washington* were drowned at sea. Robinson’s poem, “Pasa Thalassa Thalassa” (“The sea is everywhere the sea.”) is associated with the drowned captain.

Gardiner, Maine

Welcome to Gardiner Maine, E. A. Robinson’s boyhood home. On your tour you will become acquainted with people and places that influenced the life of this outstanding American poet. Many of the sites have changed little from the time when young Win Robinson, as he was known by his friends, walked the streets of his neighborhood. Please be aware that the homes on our tour are privately owned, and we ask that you respect the owner’s privacy. Gardiner was a mill town founded in 1754 by Dr. Silvester Gardiner. He selected for his settlement a site where the Cobbosseecontee Stream emptied into the Kennebec River. Eight dams were built on the Cobbossee, three of which remain. The most accessible dam is on Water Street between Central and Walnut Streets. During Win’s time, every inch of real estate on both sides of the Cobbossee contained a mill or manufacturing facility. On the Kennebec, sailing ships waited to load products of these mills and take them to major cities on the east coast and around the world. Young Win Robinson’s Gardiner was a bustling, thriving mill town, but Gardiner was also home to a number of people who loved books, music, poetry, and lively discussion, who embraced and encouraged young Win.



Downtown Gardiner

Historic Downtown Gardiner

This two-block district of downtown Gardiner was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980. Most of these commercial buildings were built during the 1800s and reflect the prosperity of the city as a center for the lumber, paper, and ice industries. The ice industry alone added about \$2,000,000 to the local economy. In the mid-1800s, some thirteen hundred sailing ships loaded and unloaded their cargos in Gardiner. In 2005, Gardiner was designated a Preserve America Community.



A Walking Tour

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| 1. Robinson House | 10. Swanton Family House |
| 2. Robinson Burial Site | 11. Barstow Family House |
| 3. Robinson Monument | 12. Harry De Forest Smith House |
| 4. Mrs. William Morrell’s School | 13. Second Dr. A.T. Schumann House |
| 5. Captain Israel Jordan House | 14. Shepherd Family House |
| 6. Dr. A.T. Schumann House | 15. The Barker Block |
| 7. Kate Vannah House | 16. Johnson Hall |
| 8. Caroline Swan House | 17. H. Dean Robinson Drug Store |
| 9. Yellow House | 18. Gardiner Public Library |

For more information about Gardiner, Maine, contact:
Gardiner Public Library at 207.582.3312 | City of Gardiner at 207.582.6888

E D W I N ARLINGTON ROBINSON



GARDINER MAINE

Tilbury Town...A Walking Tour

www.earobinson.com

6. The Dr. A. T. Schumann House
49 Lincoln Avenue

This Italianate house was the home of Alanson Tucker Schumann, a homeopathic physician and bachelor whose passion was writing poetry. The doctor, in spite of the twenty-three-year age difference, became a friend and mentor to the aspiring poet. Schumann introduced the teenager to Caroline Swan’s Gardiner Poetry Group. A tribute to the doctor’s influence in Robinson’s own words appears in Richard Cary’s *Uncollected Poems and Prose of Edwin Arlington Robinson*: “As I shall never know the



extent of my indebtedness to his interest and belief in my work, or to my unconscious absorption of his technical enthusiasm, I am glad for the obvious opportunity to acknowledge a debt that I cannot even estimate.” Schumann published one book of poetry, *The Man and the Rose*, 1911.

7. The Kate Vannah House
39 Lincoln Avenue

Letitia Kate Vannah, was about fifteen when the Robinsons moved to Gardiner. Educated at St. Joseph’s College in Emmitsburg, Maryland, she spent two years living in London after graduation. She was the organist at St. Joseph’s Catholic Church on School Street, and performed at many public concerts. Dozens of her musical compositions were published, including one played at the 1893 World’s Fair. Dr. Gertrude Heath of Farmingdale and Kate composed a song “The Flag”. The framed manuscript is on view in the Community Archives Room of the Gardiner Public Library. By 1897, Win became despondent following the departure of old friends and the

death of his parents. According to Hagedorn’s biography of E.A.R., Kate wrote to a friend: “Win Robinson marched bravely in the other evening about 7:45 and by 10:40 his shyness had thawed *consiblle* and he got on with us very well. He longs to be away from Gardiner and I can understand how he is at war with his surroundings ... I pity Win.” She died in Boston in 1933.

8. The Caroline Swan House
57 School Street

This gracious, federal style home built by Edward Swan in 1803 was the home of Miss Caroline Swan, a teacher who wrote essays and poetry. She formed the Gardiner Poetry Group consisting of Dr. Schumann, Judge Henry Sewall Webster, and eventually Win. Caroline became acquainted with William Henry Thorne who published a quarterly review, *The Globe*, where Caroline’s works were printed. Two of Robinson’s early poems were first published in the September 1894 issue, ”The House on the Hill” and “The Miracle.” Thorne left a wife and five children behind in New York. According to Henry Richards, a neighbor, Robinson’s poem “Flammonde” was a “photographic likeness” of Thorne. Eventually *The Globe* failed, and Thorne fled



Gardiner, leaving Caroline in debt. She left Gardiner around 1905 and died in South Portland, Maine, on April 4, 1938 at the age of ninety-six.

9. The Yellow House
3 Dennis Street

This federal style house built in 1814 for John Hazeltine was the home of Laura and Henry Richards and their six children. Laura, daughter of Julia Ward Howe and Samuel Gridley Howe, married Henry on June 17,

1871 in Boston. After settling in Gardiner, Laura wrote children’s books and rhymes to support her family. In 1917, she received the first Pulitzer Prize for Biography for *Julia Ward Howe*. When Laura read *The Torrent and the Night Before*, she invited Robinson to The Yellow House. Thus began a friendship that lasted throughout his life. Both Laura and her husband’s cousin, John Hays Gardiner, supported Robinson both morally and financially until he achieved recognition. Laura’s son, Hal, a teacher at Groton, read some poems from *Children of the Night* to his students, one of whom was Kermit



Roosevelt, son of President Theodore Roosevelt. The President was impressed by the book and arranged a position in the New York Custom House for Robinson to support himself. It is interesting how the friendship of this mother of six and the young poet led to other friendships that played such an important part in E.A.R.’s life. Both Laura and John Hays Gardiner continued to exchange letters with Robinson – Hays until his death in 1913 and Laura until the poet died in 1935.

10. The Swanton House
25 Kingsbury Street

This was the home of the widow, Mary Olivia Swanton, her three sons, and her aunt, Dorcas Gay. The Swantons had a happy household into which Win Robinson was readily accepted. The five-acre farm had a front yard that extended down to the Kennebec River, where the boys loved to swim or build rafts and drift on the current. In 1894, Mary moved to Massachusetts. Win sent a copy of *The Torrent and the Night Before* to Mary. She read the book of this boy who had

lived in her house almost as one of her own sons, and wrote Robinson, “regretting that his book was so ‘gloomy’ and ‘pessimistic.’” According to Hagerdorn, Robinson responded, “he, gloomy? He, pessimistic? Could people not read?”

11. The Barstow House
148 Brunswick Avenue

Here, Win and the four Barstow brothers roasted apples and onions on the furnace in the cellar. After high school, Win and Joe Barstow remained friends, reading books together under the pines on Iron Mine Hill. In the fall of 1895, Joe became engaged, and they drifted apart. After 1897 Robinson finally made New York his home. The youngest Barstow brother, Jamie, and Win met again and spent many evenings together, eating, drinking, and probably talking of boyhood days around the Barstows’ furnace.

12. Harry DeForest Smith House
52 Old Brunswick Road

This was the home of Charles Smith, his wife, Sarah Hildreth Smith and their only child, Harry. Win and Harry met at Gardiner High School. The young friends spent hours at the Smith farm under the tall pines on Iron Mine Hill, smoking, reading books, discussing philosophy, and dreaming of



their futures. Harry graduated from Bowdoin College and became a teacher in Rockland, Maine. In 1896, he earned an M.A. from Harvard and went to Germany to study at the University of Berlin, while Robinson remained in Gardiner. Win visited Harry’s parents frequently. Harry secured a post at Amherst in 1899, retiring as Professor Emeritus of Greek in 1939. He died in February 1943.

13. Second Dr. A. T. Schumann House
228 Maine Avenue, Farmingdale

Around 1900, Dr. Schumann decided to marry Emma Hatch of Farmingdale. Their new home, the Century House, was

impressive with thirteen Italian marble fireplaces. He continued to write poetry until his death in 1918. His friend Robinson wrote a tribute to him in the *Boston Transcript*, saying in part, “By profession a physician in Gardiner, Me. he still found time to live what was the best part of his life in the land of fancy—a land where he saw much that others might not have seen.”

14. The Shepherd Ho use
154 Maine Avenue, Farmingdale

Emma Shepherd, the poet’s sister-in-law as well as the object of his unrequited love, grew up in this house. After keeping all three Robinson brothers in suspense, Emma married Herman because his prospects for success in business seemed brightest. However, Herman’s failed business ventures in the mid-West drove him and Emma home to Maine in 1893. Soon he became an alcoholic. After a distress sale of the Robinson family residence on Lincoln Avenue in 1903 left Herman and Emma homeless, they stayed at the Shepherd house in Farmingdale until Emma’s sister forced Herman to leave. Herman’s health declined rapidly, and he died in a public hospital ward in Boston in 1909. In the past forty years, the standard interpretation of Robinson’s poetry is predicated upon the love-triangle of Win, his brother Herman, and Emma.

15. The Quadruped
The Barker Block, 283 Water Street

In 1897 Robinson and friends Seth Ellis Pope, Linville Robbins, and Arthur Blair rented a room on the back of the third floor of the Barker Block above Brown’s Dry Goods store. They met almost nightly, called themselves The Quadruped, and talked of books and their futures. Robinson would read his poetry. Here he wrote the first draft of “Aunt Imogene,” a thinly veiled account of his relationship with his three nieces, Ruth, Marie, and Barbara, daughters of Emma and Herman.

16. Johnson Hall
280 Water Street

Johnson Hall was built in 1864 by Benjamin Johnson who owned a hotel next door. Mr. Johnson decided Gardiner needed a place to accommodate large gatherings for a variety of entertainment.

The two upper floors contained the great hall, stage, balcony, and a banquet room with a stable on the ground floor. In 1884 the stable was replaced by a storefront. Entertainment included operas, trained animal acts, and dramatic productions. In 1929 “talkies” came to Gardiner. The hall was retrofitted to a movie theatre that accommodated six hundred people. Johnson Hall Opera House continued as a movie theatre until the late 1950s. After the theatre closed, it was used as a storage facility. In the late 1980s a non-profit organization, Johnson Hall, Inc., acquired the building and reopened it as a Performing Arts Center. Plans are underway to restore this beautiful theater.

17. H. D. Robinson & Co., Drugs, Medicines & Chemicals
207 Water Street

Robinson’s eldest brother, Horace Dean, was a physician who practiced in Camden where he developed severe neuralgia and began taking morphine to ease his pain. He became dependent on the narcotic, eventually suffering from hallucinations. He retuned to Gardiner and got a job as a weigher with an ice company. In 1897, trying to save his brothers, Robinson bought an interest in the F. M. Noyes Apothecary. It did not succeed. Dean Robinson died in 1899 at the age of forty-two from a drug overdose. The poem “How Annandale Went Out” is a thinly-veiled account of Dean’s death.

18. Gardiner Public Library
152 Water Street

The Gardiner Public Library opened in April 1882 and was the second public library in the state. It was designed by architect Henry Richards, Laura Richards’ husband, in Jacobean Revival style. The building cost \$13,000. Win would have been twelve when the Library opened. There have been additions and renovations done over the 125 years. The Community Archives Room opened in 1985 and contains historical and genealogical resources. The Gardiner Library Association owns the building and is responsible for its maintenance.

