

Major Life Events of Robert Frost:

1874 – **Robert Frost is born in San Francisco** on March 26 to William Prescott Frost Jr., a journalist from New Hampshire, and Isabelle Moodie, a schoolteacher from Scotland. "I know San Francisco like my own face...It's where I came from, the first place I really knew...[It is] the first place in my memory, a place I still go back to in my dreams."¹ Named after General Robert E. Lee, whom his father admired.

1876 – **Robert's sister Jeanie is born.**

1881 – **Enters public school** in the second grade, "excelling in geography and writing². Later left elementary school after the third grade. "A pattern was put in place early in his life that would play out in distinct ways later on. Organized education, as he later said, was 'never [his] taste.'"³

1885 – **William Frost dies of tuberculosis.** The Frost family is called back to the East Coast by William's family for his funeral. "Frost absorbed from his father a great deal, including a feral drive to make something of himself, to exercise influence, to feel the world bending to his will...Frost's lifelong...passion to excel and win in whatever he did [was] also a legacy from his father."⁴

1885 – **Frost family moves to New England.** They first live with William Frost's family in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Frost recalled, "At first I disliked the Yankees. They were cold. They seemed narrow to me. I could not get used to them."⁵

1886 – **Isabelle begins teaching at a school in Salem**, a school which her two children also attend. "[Frost] excelled in all subjects at school and begged his mother to read to him...traditional ballads, mostly Scottish...Percy's *Reliques*...Ossian, Poe, Wordsworth, Longfellow, and Bryant...But Emerson was his favorite, and would become a crucial influence on his thought."⁶

1892 – Frost's sister Jeanie is hospitalized, and **Frost takes a leave of absence from school**, resigning from his position as editor of the Lawrence High School *Bulletin*. "Before leaving...he instructed his staff at the *Bulletin* to assemble enough material for future issues. When he came back to school, in January, he discovered that no December issue had been published and that the vaults were empty of copy. He was furious and first thought of resigning, then decided to write enough himself to complete an issue. 'I went down to the printer's office, and in the little cubby hole down there I wrote the whole number. I wrote a story; I wrote an essay; I wrote editorials; I wrote a poem...I wrote the whole thing myself right there, delivered it to the printer's devil, and resigned!'"⁷

¹ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 3.

² Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 12

³ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 16.

⁴ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 18-19.

⁵ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 20.

⁶ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 23.

⁷ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 28-29.



1892 – **Frost begins courtship with future wife** Elinor White while in attendance at Lawrence High School. "They often met, after school, in the Lawrence Public Library,"⁸ where they would exchange work by their favorite poets. They later shared valedictory honors at their high school graduation.

1892 – Frost, though he had originally planned to go to Harvard, **begins undergraduate studies at Dartmouth College** in Hanover, New Hampshire. His grandparents, who were to pay his tuition, refused to pay for him to attend Harvard. "Frost had never really doubted that he would go to Harvard, but in the spring of his senior year...he stumbled on his grandparents' doubts and objections. Harvard, they argued, was 'a drinking place.'"⁹

1892 – While at Dartmouth, Frost devotes most of his time to studying poetry, hiking, and writing "long, confessional letters to Elinor at St. Lawrence University, where it seemed to him that she was settling in too comfortably."¹⁰ Eventually **withdraws from Dartmouth** around Thanksgiving and returns home. "I wasn't suited for the place...We go to college to be given one more chance to learn to read...Once we have learned to read, the rest can be trusted to add itself unto us."¹¹

1893 – Frost takes over his mother's elementary school class while she is given a class of "younger, more pliant children to look after."¹² Frost "was forced to resort to a kind of violence that would nowadays land a teacher in jail, [but] he succeeded in winning the attention, if not the affection, of his pupils...[However] Frost knew...that teaching children was not for him." He later **tells Elinor in a letter that he intends to write poetry** for a living instead.

1893 – **Frost's paternal grandmother dies** suddenly in her sleep. She was perhaps the first person to appreciate her grandson's "artistic leanings."¹³ "Frost intuited her support and concern, and her death hit him surprisingly hard"¹⁴.

1893 – **Frost composes "first real poem,"** "My Butterfly," which he wrote "all in one go in the kitchen of [his] house."¹⁵ "As he wrote 'My Butterfly,' he had a profound sense that 'something was happening. It was like cutting along a nerve.'"¹⁶ **"My Butterfly" is later accepted by the *New York Independent*, a national journal,** making it the first Frost poem to be published. "He receives fifteen dollars for his work."¹⁷

⁸ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 30.

⁹ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 31-32.

¹⁰ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 36.

¹¹ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 37.

¹² Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 38.

¹³ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 41.

¹⁴ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 41.

¹⁵ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 42.

¹⁶ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 42.

¹⁷ "Robert Frost Timeline of Important Dates," Shmoop, accessed July 25, 2011, <http://www.shmoop.com/robert-frost/timeline.html>



1894 – Is rejected by Elinor for not having a job, and **travels to the Dismal Swamp** in Norfolk, VA. "He thought of it as the possible place where he might end his life and so mete out the proper punishment to Elinor,"¹⁸ who by that time was immersed in her life at St. Lawrence. This theme of personal discovery through time spent in the wilderness will become a major theme in Frost's work. "If Frost can be said to have an archetypal poem, it is one in which the poet sets off, forlorn or despairing, into the wilderness, where he will either lose his soul or find that Gnostic spark of revelation."¹⁹

1895 – **Frost weds Elinor** on December 19 at his mother's church in Lawrence. "The twenty-one-year-old Frost at last married his high school sweetheart...The union was finally made, although the ambivalence of Elinor and the frustrations of Robert were never quite resolved."²⁰

1896 – Frost's **first child, Elliott, is born** on September 25.

1897 – **Frost Enters Harvard** as a special student, and is financially supported by his grandfather. Takes classes in English composition and literature, Latin, Greek, philosophy, and geology.

1899 – **Frost withdraws from Harvard** and returns to Lawrence when Elinor's pregnancy takes a turn for the worse. He receives an "honorable dismissal" from the Dean of the College. When he gets to Lawrence, he immediately begins feeling ill. "A local doctor...said forcefully that he must change his sedentary way of life, which only exacerbated his symptoms; he recommended farming as a plausible occupation for someone with Frost's temperament."²¹ This advice would stay with Frost for the rest of his life.

1899 – The Frost family moves to a farm Methuen, Massachusetts. **Frost's second child, Lesley, is born** on April 28. "Lesley is later one of only two Frost children to outlive their father."²²

1900 – Frost's son **Elliott dies of typhoid fever** at their farm on July 8. "Frost blamed himself for not calling a good doctor sooner: it was 'like murdering his own child,' he said."²³

1900 – The Frost family, having fallen several months behind in rent, is evicted from the Powder House Hill farm in Methuen. **The Frost family moves to a farm in Derry, New Hampshire**, which is offered to them by a friend of Elinor's mother and is financed by Frost's grandfather. "Thus began what is unquestionably the most important phase of Frost's long life, the period when he came into close contact for the first time with the material that would furnish him with a lifetime

¹⁸ Kathleen Morrison, *Robert Frost: A Pictorial Chronicle* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), 1.

¹⁹ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 49.

²⁰ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 54.

²¹ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 66.

²² "Robert Frost Timeline of Important Dates," Shmoop, accessed July 25, 2011, <http://www.shmoop.com/robert-frost/timeline.html>

²³ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 68.



of imagery. He would learn to take metaphors where he found them, often in the rustic world around him. And he would find poetry in the speech of the outwardly unremarkable men and women who lived on the surrounding farms."²⁴ The Frost family spends the next eleven years at the Derry Farm. "By the time he emerged at the end of this decade of farming, writing, and teaching, he would be fully formed: a major modern poet who had found his voice."²⁵

1900 – **Isabelle Frost dies** of cancer at a sanatorium in Penacook, New Hampshire.

1901 – **Frost's grandfather dies** suddenly, leaving Frost a large sum of money in the form of a trust, and forgiving all previous loans. "The young man was hardly set up for life, but was now assured a certain minimal income."²⁶ "Grandfather Frost had financed the purchase of the [Derry] farm. Grandfather Frost was more generous and more canny than Robert ever admitted...In his will Grandfather Frost wrote one stipulation: Robert was to have the farm without rent, but it would not become *his* farm until he had lived there ten years. "

1902 – **Frost's third child (and second son), Carol, is born** on May 22.

1903 – **Frost's fourth child (and second daughter), Irma, is born** on June 27. "Frost was devoted to his young family...he played with the children, educated them, thought about their development. He was present on the scene, daily...There was almost nothing else in his life in the Derry years."²⁷

1905 – **Frost's fifth child (and third daughter), Marjorie, is born** on March 29.

1907 – **Frost's sixth and final child (and fourth daughter), Elinor Bettina, is born** on June 18, but dies three days later.

1912 – After Frost blows through several teaches positions across New Hampshire, **the Frost family moves to England** in August so that Frost can study and compose poetry. "He had enough money in hand from the sale of the Derry house and his grandfather's annuity to make a move that would involve considerable financial risk...the idea of living in the cradle of English lyric poetry was irresistible."²⁸ It is during this time that Frost works on the manuscript for *A Boy's Will*.

1913 – **Frost's first book, *A Boy's Will*, is published in England.** "As an American, Frost could not avoid certain misgivings about bringing out his work in England first; indeed, he could not help feeling some resentment that his work had not been eagerly greeted in his own country—even though he had never made significant attempts to get published there. In any case, it was gratifying to find such enthusiasm for this work in the country that had produced Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth."²⁹

²⁴ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 72.

²⁵ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 73.

²⁶ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 80.

²⁷ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 83.

²⁸ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 113.

²⁹ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 123.



1914 - **Frost starts work on the central poems of *North of Boston*, which is published on May 15.** "England's great gift to Robert Frost was recognition. England discovered him as he was discovering himself."³⁰

1915 – **Frost family leaves England** on February 13. "Frost was...deeply worried that he was leaving behind the only community that had ever been supportive of his claims to being a poet...He had made considerable headway in England as a poet, and his reputation had already filtered home. He could not, however, anticipate the full extent of the success that awaited him upon disembarkation."³¹

1915 – **Frost family moves to farm in Franconia, New Hampshire** in June. "Frost found a little farm near the village of Sugar Hill...and knew immediately that this was for him...It was primitive, with no indoor plumbing or electricity. A woodstove in the kitchen provided heat for the house...and an uphill spring supplied water...He had not been writing poetry seriously for several months, ever since the return from England, but he quickly found his rhythm again."³²

1916 – **Frost embarks on his first lecture tour**, making stops at such places as Dartmouth, the New England Association of Teachers of English, the University of Pennsylvania, Amherst College, and Harvard University, where he read as the Phi Beta Kappa poet. "Just half a year back in the United States, Frost found himself a real contender for that small quantity of attention devoted by the reading public to new poetry"³³.

1917 – **Frost's closest friend, Edward Thomas, dies**, becoming a casualty of WWI in France. In a letter to Thomas's wife, Frost wrote, "Edward Thomas was the only brother I ever had...I have had four wonderful years with him...He is all yours...But you must let me cry my cry for him as if he were *almost* all mine too."³⁴ Later publishes poem entitled "To E.T." in the *Yale Review*.

1917 – **Frost is offered a teaching position at Amherst College.** "Little did Frost know, of course, that this association with Amherst would become a more-or-less permanent aspect of his life until his death."³⁵ Frost's initial Amherst years are rocky, even though he is offered full professorship, free reign over his classes, and an honorary degree (the first of many). "Frost [didn't realize] how out-of-the-mainstream his approach was. He was highly eccentric, highly original, as a teacher. He encouraged a kind of rebellion against the standard approaches to life. He was almost aggressively self-determined, self-determining."³⁶ His three teaching stints at Amherst "take place 1917-1920, 1923-1925, and 1926-1938."³⁷

³⁰ David Bradley, *Robert Frost: A Tribute to the Source* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1979), 80.

³¹ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 158-159.

³² Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 163-167.

³³ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 172.

³⁴ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 179.

³⁵ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 175-176.

³⁶ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 222.

³⁷ "Robert Frost Timeline of Important Dates," Shmoop, accessed July 25, 2011, <http://www.shmoop.com/robert-frost/timeline.html>



1920 – Frost sells house in Franconia due to its inhospitality toward farming and the fact of it not being winterized, but continues to use it as a summer home.
Frost family moves to house in South Shaftsbury, Vermont.

1921 – **Frost begins his affiliation with Bread Loaf School of English** at Middlebury College, a relationship which will happen over 42 summers. "Wilfred Davison...had founded the Bread Loaf School of English on the mountain campus of the college...Five years later, at Frost's suggestion, the Bread Loaf Writer's Conference had been started by John Farrar...Frost's presence on the mountain became a huge part of its attraction to would-be writers."³⁸

1923 – **Carol marries Lillian LaBatt**, Marjorie's long-time best friend. *New Hampshire* is published in November.

1924 – **Frost is awarded his first Pulitzer Prize** for *New Hampshire*.

1925 – **Receives special fellowship at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.** "His fellowship [was] created especially for him and will exist for life. The fellowship entails no obligations of teaching and it provides for all living expenses. He will have his entire freedom to work and write."³⁹ It was an offer he could not refuse. "This life of well-cultivated leisure was just right for creativity, and Frost's muse responded well...He had written a dozen or more poems as good as any that had yet been written in the United States...What remains interesting...is Frost's consistent use of imagery taken from rural New England; even living in Ann Arbor did not distract him from his regional preoccupation."⁴⁰

1926 – **Irma marries John Paine Cone**, who intended to take her back to Kansas and run a wheat farm. They have two sons together, but divorce in 1946.

1927 – **Frost returns to Amherst for spring semester** after being offered a \$5,000 teaching position by the president of Amherst. "He was glad to rejoin his family in South Shaftsbury, and to put the Midwest behind him...It was always Amherst that mattered to him...Wherever else he taught, it felt temporary. Amherst was always home."⁴¹

1929 – **Lesley marries** Dwight Francis while the Frosts are abroad. They are married for two years until their divorce in 1931—Lesley retains full custody of the children.

1929 – **Jeanie Frost dies** in Augusta, Maine, at the State Hospital (a mental hospital). "It was an abiding tragedy for her brother, who saw traces of insanity in himself and his children that often led to fits of anxiety. [After being committed] he rarely saw her again, finding visits too painful to withstand."⁴²

³⁸ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 270.

³⁹ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 228.

⁴⁰ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 233-236.

⁴¹ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 238-243.

⁴² Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 199-200.



1930 – Publishes *Collected Poems*, which goes on to win the Pulitzer Prize—Frost's second. "Frost was at the height of his intellectual powers as 1930 approached, although much of his best work lay behind him...In the end, this capacious book solidified his reputation, appealing to a wide range of readers with varying degrees of critical sophistication."⁴³

1930 – Frost is elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. "This was an important milestone for Frost, who had belonged for many years to the lesser National Institute of Arts and Letters. At least, it seemed, the heights of Parnassus had been scaled."⁴⁴

1933 – Marjorie marries Willard E. Fraser. They are married for nearly a year until shortly after the birth of their daughter in 1934, when Marjorie dies of puerperal fever. Frost wrote, "The noblest of all of us is dead and has taken our hearts out of the world with her."

1936 – *A Further Range* is published, and goes on to receive the Pulitzer Prize in 1937, Frost's third.

1938 – Elinor dies March 20 of heart failure at their winter home in Gainesville, Florida, ending their marriage of forty-three years. "Elinor encouraged and loved him, and served as a permanent muse until her death...With regard to Elinor, [Frost] was positively uxorious. Most of his poems, he said, were written to her; all of his books thus far had been dedicated to her...Elinor's death had, in a sense, changed everything."⁴⁵

1938 – Frost begins a relationship with Kay Morrison, wife of his friend Ted, four months after Elinor's death. Eventually proposes to Kay as part of the "impulsive behavior of a grief-stricken man."⁴⁶ Kay said no, but "a peculiar triangle was in place there, with Ted and Kay definitely married, but with Frost on hand as a kind of uncle, as a close relative. Ted...must have known what was happening—or had happened—between Frost and his wife, but he trusted Kay. He was also deeply respectful of Frost's genius, and he was willing to let a great deal pass unnoticed."⁴⁷ Still, "the relationship between Frost and Kay appears to have slipped into the platonic realm rather quickly."⁴⁸

1940 – Carol commits suicide by "[shooting] himself in the head in the head with a deer rifle."⁴⁹ He is found in the morning lying on the kitchen floor by his son Prescott.

1941 – Frost moves to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he lives until his death.

⁴³ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 267-268.

⁴⁴ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 268.

⁴⁵ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 54, 312-313.

⁴⁶ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 315.

⁴⁷ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 315.

⁴⁸ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 316.

⁴⁹ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 332.



1942 – ***A Witness Tree* is published** in April, and is dedicated to Kay. It wins Frost his fourth and final Pulitzer Prize.

1947 – **Frost has Irma committed** to the New Hampshire state mental hospital. "It was a sad day for Frost, who now looked back over the fate of his children with a sense of despair."⁵⁰

1950 – **U.S. Senate adopts a resolution honoring Frost**, offering him the "felicitations of the Nation which he has served so well."⁵¹

1954 – **Frost attends the World Congress of Writers conference** in São Paulo, Brazil. His daughter Lesley "appealed to her father's sense of patriotism, explaining that U.S. relations with South America were at an all-time low...Frost presence as part of the U.S. delegation would send a strong, positive message to the Brazilian people...Frost disliked Brazil on the whole...but he worked extremely hard, giving solid performances wherever he went."⁵²

1957 – **Frost is awarded his twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth honorary degrees** from Oxford and Cambridge Universities. "He seemed genuinely to like public occasions. But he was a solitary man, at heart. The honors, as he knew, were nothing beside the poems. The poems were everything. In that sense, he was the complete poet."⁵³

1958 – **Frost becomes the poetry consultant at the Library of Congress.** "The position had no specific responsibilities, although Frost was expected to spend various intervals of time, through the period of his appointment, at the library. The duties of his job...included maintaining the poetry collection at the library, inviting poets to read, and being the symbolic figurehead for poetry."⁵⁴

1960 – **Frost is awarded the Congressional Gold Medal**, "passed by Congress and signed by President Eisenhower in 1960 but bestowed, in 1962, by President Kennedy."⁵⁵

1961 – At the age of 86, **Frost becomes the first inaugural poet** at the January 20 inauguration of John F. Kennedy. "Blinded by the harsh sunlight, he is unable to read 'Dedication,' the poem he prepared for the event. Instead he recites his poem 'The Gift Outright' from memory"⁵⁶ to much acclaim.

1962 – **Frost meets Nikita Khrushchev.** "At President Kennedy's urging, Frost accepts an invitation to meet Nikita Khrushchev, the head of the Soviet Union.

⁵⁰ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 376.

⁵¹ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 382.

⁵² Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 393-394.

⁵³ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 395.

⁵⁴ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 408.

⁵⁵ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 408.

⁵⁶ "Robert Frost Timeline of Important Dates," Shmoop, accessed July 25, 2011, <http://www.shmoop.com/robert-frost/timeline.html>



The two discuss U.S.-Russia relations at Frost's bedside, since he [had fallen] ill on the trip."⁵⁷

1963 – **Frost dies** of a pulmonary embolism; his ashes are interred at the family plot in Bennington, Vermont. "A great a long life had come, quietly, to an end. America had lost a poet of astounding grace and wisdom, one who had lodged dozens of poems in places where they could certainly not be gotten rid of easily, or at all."⁵⁸

⁵⁷ "Robert Frost Timeline of Important Dates," Shmoop, accessed July 25, 2011, <http://www.shmoop.com/robert-frost/timeline.html>

⁵⁸ Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 440.

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