

Pearson, James Larkin ^[1]

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James Larkin Pearson

1879-1981



James Larkin Pearson ^[2](Biography and picture reprinted with permission from the [James Larkin Pearson Library](#) ^[2] of Wilkes Community College)

The second [Poet Laureate](#) ^[3] of North Carolina was born in [Wilkes County](#) ^[4], September 13, 1879. His name was James Larkin Pearson, son of William and Louise McNeil Pearson. Born in the Berry's Mountain community, he was delivered by a "granny-woman" in a crude cabin his family called home. As Pearson would state in his book *My Fingers and My Toes*, "So far as could be discovered by the 'granny-woman' and all the visitors, I was a normal baby. But about four years later they were not so sure. One cold winter day when I was four-and-a-half years old, my father had me out with him and asked me, "Jimmy, are you cold?" Without taking any time to study out my answer, it came like a flash:

"My fingers and my toes,

My feet and my hands,

Are jist as cold

As you ever see'd a man's"

In early boyhood, James Larkin Pearson was determined to become a poet. He had little formal education, and early in life he worked on the farm and did some carpentering. Pearson says of his schooling: "Had only a very moderate liking for history and geography, and couldn't endure arithmetic at all. Liked my old *Fourth Reader* very well, because it had some poetry in it...Was set down as a hopeless case, who there was no use trying to educate. Quit school entirely at 16, having never been in school more than 12 months, from first to last." He further states that he "Worked on the farm till I was 21 years old. Many of my poems were composed as I went about my work on the farm. I always carried my notebook and pencil to the field with me, and as I trudged between the plow-handles in the hot sunshine, my mind was busy working out a poem."

In the early 1900's Pearson worked with R. Don Laws on *The Yellow Jacket*, a highly successful paper printed at Moravian Falls, NC. Some few years later, Mr. Pearson began his own paper, *The Fool-Killer*. This paper was a success, acquiring a circulation of some 5,000 readers.

On May 1, 1907, James Larkin Pearson married Cora Wallace. During the years with his first wife, the Pearson's adopted

a daughter, Agnes, who arrived in their home on the "Fifty Acres" near Boomer, in May 1923. After many years, of being a semi-invalid, Cora passed away in 1934. Five years later, he met Eleanor Fox of [Guilford College](#) [5] and got married again. "She was also a precious sweet person and I lived happily with her for 23 years."

After the death of Eleanor, he decided he should return to North Wilkesboro, to the home of his daughter, Mrs. Agnes Eller. He built a library/office/print shop building on the lot to the rear of his daughter's home on Sparta Road. In this building is where he housed his collection of memorabilia, books, and printing press. This collection was to become the James Larkin Pearson Library, housed on the campus of Wilkes Community College.

Pearson's publications include, *Castle Gates, Fifty Acres and Other Selected Poems, Early Harvest, Pearson's Poems, Plowed Ground, Selected Poems of James Larkin Pearson, and My Fingers and My Toes*. On August 4, 1953, [Governor William B. Umstead](#) [6] appointed Pearson as the North Carolina Poet Laureate of the State. He held this post until his death, on August 27, 1981.

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