



PEACH PRESERVES

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Georgia Poetry Society Newsletter



The Courage to Create a Legacy

Courage is a word we often associate with the grand gestures of poetry—the boldness to speak truth, to share our deepest vulnerabilities on the page, and to look at the world with open eyes. But there is another kind of courage that keeps our community alive. It is the quiet, steady courage of stewardship.

A state poetry society does not exist by magic. It exists because individuals choose to roll up their sleeves and ensure that poetry has a home, a voice, and a future in Georgia. It is an act of dedication to move from being a reader or a listener to being a builder.

Right now, the Georgia Poetry Society is looking for individuals who have the courage to step forward and serve. We have vital board positions open, and we are looking for members who don't just cherish the title, but who possess the heart and energy to do the meaningful work of keeping this society vibrant.

If you appreciate the value of what this society brings to our state—the workshops, the connections, the celebration of the written word—we need you. We need your hands, your time, and your vision. Let us work together to ensure that our society remains a living, breathing reality for generations to come, and not just a beautiful memory.

If you are ready to step up and offer your support, please reach out to me directly. Let's write the next chapter of our society together.

Warmly,
Barbara Barry Nishanian
President, Georgia Poetry Society

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A Small Note on Courage

Every submission begins with a moment of courage — that quiet, private decision to believe in your own voice. It doesn't matter whether you've been writing for decades or only recently found your way to poetry. The act of sending your work out is a declaration: my words matter.

This month's newsletter is filled with tools to help you navigate the practical side of submissions, but the heart of the process is still courage. And courage grows each time you use it.

The Discipline of Noticing

The Discipline of Noticing Poetry begins long before the pen touches the page. It begins in the quiet discipline of noticing — the way light pools on a countertop, the rhythm of a stranger's footsteps, the small shift in a loved one's voice when they say they're fine. Most poets aren't short on inspiration; they're short on time spent paying attention. This month, give yourself permission to slow down. Carry a pocket notebook or open a notes app and jot down one detail a day that catches your eye. Not a poem — just a detail. Over time, these fragments become the raw material of your voice. Noticing is a form of courage too: the courage to believe that the world is still worth looking at closely.

What Makes a Poem Feel Alive?

A poem lives or dies by its energy — that subtle sense of movement that keeps a reader leaning forward. Energy doesn't come from shouting or drama; it comes from tension. A poem feels alive when something is at stake: a decision, a memory, a shift in understanding. If you're revising this month, ask yourself: Where is the pulse? Look for the moment where the speaker wants something, fears something, or realizes something. Strengthen that moment. Clarify it. Let the poem breathe around it. When a poem has a heartbeat, readers feel it — even if they can't explain why.

The Gift of the Unfinished Draft

We often treat unfinished drafts like failures — half-formed ideas, abandoned lines, poems that “didn’t work.” But drafts are not failures; they are invitations. Every unfinished poem is a record of your mind reaching toward something true.

Instead of discarding those drafts, revisit them with curiosity. What were you trying to say before the words slipped away? What image or emotion first sparked the attempt? Sometimes the poem you meant to write is still waiting for you, patient and quiet.

This month, open an old folder and see what wants another chance.

As you begin sending your poems into the world, remember that rejections are not a verdict on your talent. Most journals receive hundreds — sometimes thousands — of submissions for only a handful of spots. A “no” often means nothing more than timing, theme, or space. Many editors say they decline excellent work simply because they can’t publish everything they admire. So if a rejection lands in your inbox, take a breath, straighten your shoulders, and send that poem back out. Persistence is part of the writing life, and every poet you admire has walked this same road.

Why Your Voice Matters in Georgia

(community-centered, ties directly to GPS mission without duplicating Barbara’s message)

Why Your Voice Matters in Georgia Poetry in Georgia is not just an art form — it’s a living conversation. Every workshop, every reading, every submission adds another voice to the chorus of our state’s creative life. Your poems, whether published or private, contribute to that chorus. When you write, you help preserve the stories, landscapes, and experiences that shape our region. When you share your work, you strengthen the community that keeps poetry thriving here. Your voice matters because it expands what Georgia poetry can be. Keep writing. Keep sharing. We’re listening.

The Quiet Power of Reading Other Poets

Poetry is often described as a solitary art — a single writer, a blank page, a moment of courage. But no poet truly writes alone. Every poem we create is shaped, in ways large and small, by the voices we have welcomed into our reading life. Reading the work of other poets is not a luxury or an optional pastime; it is one of the most essential practices of becoming a stronger, more resonant writer.

When we read widely, we expand the possibilities of our own voice. Each poet we encounter teaches us something: how an image can unfold across a stanza, how a line break can create surprise, how silence can carry meaning, how a metaphor can open a door we didn't know existed. Even poems that don't speak to us directly still sharpen our awareness of craft. They show us what choices are available, what risks others have taken, and what paths we might explore next.

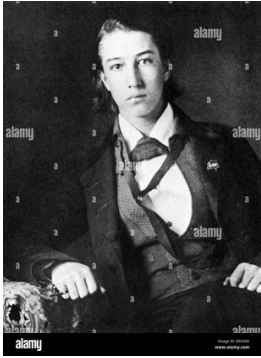
Reading also deepens our sense of belonging. Poetry can feel like an intimate, private endeavor, but when we read the work of others, we step into a larger conversation — one that stretches across states, generations, and traditions. We hear echoes of our own questions in someone else's lines. We recognize a landscape, a grief, a joy. We discover that our experiences are part of a shared human fabric, and that our voice contributes to that fabric in ways we may not have realized.

There is another gift in reading: it keeps us humble and brave at the same time. Humble, because we see how much there is to learn. Brave, because we witness how boldly others have written their truths. When we read poets who take risks — in form, in subject, in vulnerability — we are reminded that we can take risks too. Their courage becomes a spark for our own.

If you want to grow this month, choose one poet whose work you've never read before. Pick up a book from a local library, browse a journal you've never explored, or revisit a poet you loved years ago. Read slowly. Read with curiosity. Read not to imitate, but to absorb the rhythms and possibilities of language.

Your poems will feel the difference. Your voice will stretch. And you will find yourself writing not from isolation, but from connection — a connection that strengthens both your craft and our poetry community here in Georgia.

Sidney Lanier: Spiritual Laureate of Georgia



Sidney Clopton Lanier (1842-1881) remains one of Georgia's most beloved literary figures — a poet whose life blended art, hardship, service, and an enduring devotion to music and language. Born in Macon in 1842, Lanier showed early gifts in both poetry and flute performance, talents he carried with him even through the most difficult chapters of his life.

During the Civil War, Lanier served in the Confederate Army, where he endured illness, imprisonment, and long stretches of deprivation. He contracted tuberculosis during the war — a condition that shaped the rest of his life and ultimately contributed to his early death at age thirty-nine. Yet even in the midst of suffering, he continued to write, sketching poems in notebooks and letters whenever he could.

After the war, Lanier's life took on a quieter but deeply influential rhythm. He worked as a clerk, a lawyer, and a musician before eventually finding his way into academia. In 1879, he became a lecturer at Johns Hopkins University, teaching English literature and developing ideas about the musicality of poetic language. His lectures explored how rhythm, tone, and sound could shape meaning — ideas that still echo in contemporary discussions of prosody.

Lanier's poetry often reflects his love of nature and music. *The Marshes of Glynn*, one of his most celebrated works, captures the sweeping beauty of Georgia's coastal landscape with a musical, almost orchestral sense of movement. His poems frequently blend spirituality, natural imagery, and an experimental approach to meter that was ahead of its time.

Though his life was short, Lanier's legacy endures in Georgia's literary history. His work reminds us that poetry can rise from hardship, that beauty can coexist with struggle, and that the landscapes of our state have long inspired artists to look more closely, breathe more deeply, and listen for the music inside language.

Sidney Lanier's Georgia Legacy

Sidney Lanier's influence appears across the state. His legacy is woven into Georgia's cultural and educational landscape, honoring both his poetry and his contributions to Southern Literature.

Georgia Places Named for Lanier

- Lake Lanier
- Lanier County – Established in 1920
- Lanier High Schools (several, including historic Lanier High School for Boys in Macon, now part of the Academy for Classical Education)
- Sidney Lanier Bridge (Brunswick) spanning the Brunswick River
- Lanier Middle and Elementary Schools
- Lanier Library (Tryon, NC) founded by admirers in 1890
- His name appears frequently in Georgia's literary circles – reading groups and historical societies often reference him as a foundational Southern poet



The Song Of The Chattahoochee by Sidney Lanier

Out of the hills of Habersham,
Down the valleys of Hall,
I hurry amain to reach the plain,
Run the rapid and leap the fall,
Split at the rock and together again,
Accept my bed, or narrow or wide,
And flee from folly on every side
With a lover's pain to attain the plain
Far from the hills of Habersham,
Far from the valleys of Hall.

All down the hills of Habersham,
All through the valleys of Hall,
The rushes cried 'Abide, abide,'
The willful waterweeds held me thrall,
The laving laurel turned my tide,
The ferns and the fondling grass said 'Stay,'
The dewberry dipped for to work delay,
And the little reeds sighed 'Abide, abide,
Here in the hills of Habersham,
Here in the valleys of Hall.'

High o'er the hills of Habersham,
Veiling the valleys of Hall,
The hickory told me manifold
Fair tales of shade, the poplar tall
Wrought me her shadowy self to hold,
The chestnut, the oak, the walnut, the pine,
Overleaning, with flickering meaning and sign,
Said, 'Pass not, so cold, these manifold
Deep shades of the hills of Habersham,
These glades in the valleys of Hall.'

And oft in the hills of Habersham,
And oft in the valleys of Hall,
The white quartz shone, and the smooth brook-stone
Did bar me of passage with friendly brawl,
And many a luminous jewel lone
-- Crystals clear or a-cloud with mist,
Ruby, garnet and amethyst --
Made lures with the lights of streaming stone
In the clefts of the hills of Habersham,
In the beds of the valleys of Hall.

But oh, not the hills of Habersham,
And oh, not the valleys of Hall
Avail: I am fain for to water the plain.
Downward the voices of Duty call --
Downward, to toil and be mixed with the main,
The dry fields burn, and the mills are to turn,
And a myriad flowers mortally yearn,
And the lordly main from beyond the plain
Calls o'er the hills of Habersham,
Calls through the valleys of Hall.

How to Build a Reading Practice

A strong writing life is built on a strong reading life. But “read more poetry” can feel vague, especially when your days are already full. A reading practice doesn’t need to be elaborate or time-consuming; it simply needs to be intentional. Here are a few gentle ways to build a habit that nourishes both your craft and your creativity.

Start small. Choose one poem a day — something you can read while your coffee brews or before you go to bed. A single poem is enough to keep your ear tuned to language and your imagination awake. Over time, these small moments accumulate into a deep well of influence.

Read beyond your comfort zone. It’s natural to gravitate toward poets who sound like you, but growth often comes from encountering voices that challenge your assumptions. Try a poet from a different era, a different region, or a different tradition. Let yourself be surprised.

Keep a “reading notebook.” Not for analysis, but for noticing. Write down one line that struck you, one image that lingered, or one craft choice you admired. This simple practice helps you understand what moves you — and why.

Mix books with journals. Poetry books give you depth; journals give you variety. Together, they expose you to emerging voices, new forms, and the evolving landscape of contemporary poetry.

Most importantly, read with generosity. Approach each poem with the assumption that it has something to teach you — about language, about attention, about courage. When you read this way, your own writing becomes richer, more flexible, and more connected to the larger world of poetry.

A reading practice isn’t a chore; it’s a quiet companionship. And the more you nurture it, the more it will nurture your work in return.