

James Whitcomb Riley

The Hoosier Poet

(October 7, 1849-July 22, 1916)

Buried in Section 61, Lot 1, the summit of Crown Hill

*Excerpt from the Crown Hill Author's Tour, written by
Tom M. Davis, Crown Hill Tour Researcher and Guide*

And now we come to the author who by virtue of his combination of fame and burial site, is probably the person most associated with Crown Hill. The question frequently comes up on our walking tours, as the group is making the long climb up the hill, how was Riley able to secure such a prime spot for his final resting place.

We will go into the particulars of the procurement later, but it seems important to first address a lack of knowledge raised by the question. In an age when Riley is rarely remembered and even more rarely revered, when even *Traces*, the magazine of the Indiana Historical Society, confesses that "Riley's work holds little interest these days to the literary critic," we have lost sight of just how famous and important Riley was at the time he was alive. I hope to give a sense of that importance with a few quotes from that era.

Let's begin with some home grown Hoosier hyperbole which appeared in the papers announcing his death.

"It is doubtful if the death of any other American of today would have carried to so many hearts, old and young, in all this broad land the twinge of personal sorrow such as has followed the passing of James Whitcomb Riley. Eulogy and tears alike will voice a sorrow well-nigh universal, and human hearts will pour from their depths the expression of love and honor to the memory of this gentle, kindly soul. Yet, try as it may, humanity will never be able to repay the debt it owes to the Hoosier Poet." — *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, July 1916.



"William B. Austin, former president of the Indiana Society of Chicago, paid an apt tribute that described the general sentiment: 'When the name "Woodrow Wilson" is forgotten; when the Civil War generals have long since passed into oblivion; James Whitcomb Riley will live in fame and in human hearts. His is the enduring fame built of universal love of his kind. It takes place with that of Charles Dickens and other men of letters whose keynote has been sympathy and love of mankind. Before his death he was the greatest living Indianan.'" — from an unidentified Indianapolis paper, by-line Chicago, July 25 [1916].

"He was the first and foremost distinctively American poet, and at the time of this death he was the greatest American. His glory is permanent. It has made the name Hoosier a proud one and will be the great and lasting inspiration of generations of Hoosiers yet to be born." — Booth Tarkington, quoted in *Indiana Daily Times*, July 24, 1916.

While this outpouring of praise and sorrow for its favorite son might have been heightened in the Hoosier state, it was by no means limited to here. As the *Springfield (Mass.) Republican* put it, "Indiana had no monopoly of affection for him." Such notices appeared in papers in Chicago, New York, St. Louis, Philadelphia, Nashville

(Tenn.), Utica, Peoria, Columbus (Ohio), Wheeling, Rochester (N.Y.), Pittsburg, Minneapolis, Kansas City, Washington D.C., and, no doubt, in other cities, large and small, all through out the country.

“Never did there live a man to whom it was easier or a more genuine pleasure to pay tribute, and the reason is this: He incorporated in lovely verse the peculiar awareness of life and love for locality and neighbors which is America’s best possession...Riley made Indiana dear as other great writers have made Greece and Italy, France and Russia, Poland and Norway, dear. As they did it by the exercise of genius that was indigenous and characteristic, so did he, and by the very intensity of its local significance, he gave it universality. It is a paradox, but it is true.”— *Chicago Tribune*, July 1916.

“...the Hoosier Poet blew heart bubbles. He took by divine right the place as an American poet which had not been occupied since Longfellow...In his verses Indiana spoke to the world.”—*New York Sun*, July 1916

“There is no doubt that he was the most popular poet of this generation in America...If there is a child today that is not regaled with ‘Orphant Annie’ that child is to be pitied.” — *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 1916.

Tributes came from our nation’s leaders: “May I not express to you my sincere sorrow at the death of James Whitcomb Riley? With his departure a notable figure passes out of the nation’s life; a man who imparted joyful pleasures and a thoughtful view of many things that other men would have missed. I am sure I am speaking the feeling of the whole country in expressing my own sense of loss.” Text of a telegraph sent to Riley’s family by President Woodrow Wilson.

“To die for one’s country is to reach the heights of glory; to live for humanity so that each succeeding age will be happier is to attain immortality. This is the record of James Whitcomb Riley. Rest to his ashes and peace to his soul.” Vice-President Thomas Marshall (Former Indiana Governor Marshall, a friend of Riley, was an honorary pall bearer at the funeral.)

And lest we think this fame and recognition suddenly burst forth upon the scene with the occasion of his death, let me cite two other examples from various histories of Indiana.

Riley received an Honorary Degree of Letters from no less than Yale University in 1902. “When the hood was placed on his shoulders, the prolonged applause of the vast throng assembled made that scholar’s emblem as a crown of laurel. Old alumni and undergraduates joined in giving the Hoosier Poet a great ovation and felt that old Yale honored itself in honoring him. The graduating class of that June day loves to claim that James Whitcomb Riley was of their class of ‘02.”

“So well did Riley capture the mood of his age that he became the unofficial poet laureate of Indiana and of the children of America. In 1911 the Indiana Federation of Women’s Clubs resolved that his birthday be set aside annually for special celebration and programs in schools...By the time of his death in 1916 his birthday was being celebrated in communities throughout much of the nation.” In 1915 the Secretary of the Interior suggested that one of his poems be read in every American school on that day.

So, while other circumstances and fortunate timing certainly played a role, the answer to the question “How was Riley able to secure such a prime spot on which to be buried?” lies in the fact that he had already secured a place in the hearts of his contemporaries as no other resident of Indianapolis ever had. “That Crown Hill holds his mortal remains well. The people to whom he meant so much think of him as faring on in a land that is fairer than day; they are glad that he lived and was theirs—is still and forever their own.”

Riley, named James Whitcomb after the man who had just been the state’s governor, was born in a log cabin in Greenfield, Indiana, on October 7, 1849. His father, Rueben A. Riley, a prominent local attorney, the village’s first mayor, who later led the townsmen as captain of their Civil War unit, had hopes that his son would follow in his respectable shoes. But Riley did not take to formal schooling. The schoolteacher of his teenage years, meeting with little success in teaching Riley, finally “informed me [Riley] gently but firmly that since I was so persistent in secretly reading novels during school hours he would insist upon his right to choose the novels I should read.” So Riley’s schooling came from reading the masterpieces of English literature,

unsupplemented by 'riting and 'rithmetic. His imagination was caught as well by the many travelers moving on the National Road, for many years the only road going from the East to the western frontier, which was right outside his front door. These westward pioneers came in wagons, carts, and prairie schooners, on foot and on horseback, and filled the village not only with their pack trains but with a constantly changing source of news, amusement, and opportunities to observe all kinds of human nature.

Riley tried to study law with his dad, but the pull of the road was just too great. In 1872 he joined a traveling medicine show, painting its advertising placards, the scenery for its shows, and sometimes contributing lyrics and recitations. He left this life a year later when he and some friends started *The Graphic Company* and began painting advertising on the sides of barns. Some even "accuse" him of starting this concept, which eventually led to just about every barn in the country urging the passers by to "See Rock City." They sometimes hyped their business by having one of them pose as a "blind sign painter." They settled down in Anderson, but had to move frequently when the income did not quite match the out go. During this time too, Riley began to contribute his verses to local newspapers, making enough of a reputation for himself as a writer, that by 1877 he was able to leave the life of painting barns and pitching miracle drugs. In April of that year he was hired to edit the Anderson *Democrat*, and his humorous touch skyrocketed the circulation from 400 to 2400. His poems were also being published through out the state, but he could not get any Eastern newspaper to accept any of them. Out of this frustration and a prankish urge to test a theory that any poem could get published if it was supposed to have been written by someone famous, he wrote a poem, "Leonainie," in the style of Edgar Allen Poe, and got a friend, the editor of the Kokomo *Dispatch*, to print it with the claim that it had been recently discovered written on the inside jacket of a book owned by Poe.

The deception worked almost too well. Some critics still believed it was written by Poe even after the hoax was uncovered. In embarrassment, he was forced to resign his position in Anderson. But that turned out to be the big break he had been hoping for, The Indianapolis *Journal* immediately offered him a position and the publicity surrounding the incident did lead to an even bigger audience for his poetry.

At the *Journal*, he began writing dialect poems such as "When the Frost is on The Punkin" under the pseudonym Ben F. Johnson of Boone, a supposed Boone County farmer. In 1878 *The Old Swimmin Hole and 'Leven More Poems* by Ben Johnson appeared. Riley financed the first 1,000 copies and made a profit of \$166.40 when they all quickly sold out. A second edition was published by Merrill, Meigs and Company, the predecessor of Bobbs-Merrill & Company, which went on to become a major publishing company, especially during the Golden Age of Indiana Literature, whose success it helped fuel as it reaped the harvest of profits.

But it was the lecture circuit that brought Riley his greatest acclaim. He made his first appearance as a reader on May 9, 1879, at a Light Infantry Benefit, "carrying the audience by storm." His powers of reading were quickly recognized and he hit the road in ever-widening circles for the next several decades. A Chicago drama critic wrote : "To hear Riley recite his own poems is a treat to be remembered an entire life...Tears come at the call of words so simple as to have a tinge of comedy, where the soft minor chords tremble. All that is quaint and humorous ignites the pleasantries within him, all that is true and innocent inspires him. He never broods, nor rails, nor chants ecstasies, but laughs and weeps and ties brave old fashioned true love knots...it is the loveliest reading I have ever heard, and the sweetest poetry." Another critic says "audiences which thronged to see what they thought would turn out to be an uncouth rustic who had penned bucolic nature poetry were astonished to find instead a dapper little man, immaculately dressed, wearing a white waistcoat and a huge gold watch chain, who was urbanity personified and who held his audience in the palm of his hand as he recited his poetry, making them laugh or weep at will." He performed nationwide, "from Boston to San Francisco, the greatest one man show," and for each succeeding president for over twenty five years.

His friend Booth Tarkington said "he held a literally unmatched power over his audience for riotous laughter or for actual copious tears, and no one who ever saw an exhibition of that power will forget it or forget him." Mark Twain, with whom he often shared the stage, wrote to him, "You are the only man alive that can read your poems exactly right. There are poets who can't read their works worth shucks... I take my hat off to you, my boy; you do know how." After a performance in Boston in 1882, Riley himself wrote to a woman he had once hoped to marry, "The papers today are, every devil of 'em, praising me, and it shows their splendid taste."

This life on the road cut into Riley's time for writing and publishing. In 1890 he resolved to give up full time touring and began to devote more time to those tasks until by 1902 eleven volumes of poetry had been published. He also grew tired of moving from hotel room to hotel room and one night in 1893, while eating dinner with his friends Major and Mrs. Charles Holstein, he announced that he would never again come to their house unless he could do it as a paying guest. He moved into their home at 528 Lockerbie Street and they made it his home as well. He lived there, between road shows, for the rest of his life, and it is now the house commonly called Riley's Home.

As he grew older, he began spending more and more of his time at "home" in Indianapolis. He donated land, worth an estimated \$75,000, for a new public library (present day Central Library). In 1911 he suffered a serious stroke, but he recovered enough to continue enjoying the world's accolades and the visits of his friends. It was in that year that Indiana school's began celebrating his birthday, followed in the next few years by the schools of the entire nation by declaration of the National Commissioner of Education. He spent his winters in Miami, but was always glad to return to Lockerbie Street. For six weeks of June and July 1916 he sat in the back room of the house for an hour a day while sculptor Myra Reynolds Richards worked on a bust of the poet. On Saturday July 22nd, mere hours after she had delivered the finished work, Riley went to bed at his usual time and died in his sleep.

A wave of grief, both heartfelt and official, rolled over the city. The *Indianapolis Daily Journal* wrote: "Only a few years ago James Whitcomb Riley stood at the bier of an old companion. The tears streamed from his eyes; emotion choked his voice. His hand fluttered for a moment above the still face below him, then, leaning on the shoulder of a friend who stood beside him, he said: 'God's breath is in the sails; His hand upon the helm.' And he turned away, groping his course to the door and out and homeward. And so, today, as the poet lies in his home in Lockerbie Street, those who kenw him and loved him, say, as he said then, 'God's breath is in the sails; His hand upon the helm.' "

Mayor Bell gave an official proclamation: "James Whitcomb Riley, the Hoosier poet, is dead. How strange it seems when at least we realize it is true. He breathed so many songs of youth that we never thought of death claiming him. His death is not a loss to a family—he left none. He belonged to the city, to the state, to the nation, and to the world. His going is a loss to all of them. He was our most distinguished and most loved citizen. He was known throughout the world. He was loved wherever poetry was loved. He has fallen asleep, and will write no more; but his poetic songs were full of the spirit of perpetual youth and will be sung throughout the centuries. Now that he has gone we realize how helpless we are to pay a tribute of respect in keeping with what he gave to humanity and what he deserves from us. We owe him a debt of gratitude greater than our ability to pay. As a token of respect I direct that the flag of the City Hall be kept at half mast during the present week, and that the city offices be closed during Tuesday afternoon, July 25, 1916, the day of the funeral. Witness my hand and the seal of the city of Indianapolis this 23rd day of July, 1916. J.E. Bell, Mayor."

Mayor Johnson, of Greenfield, telegraphed Riley's brother-in-law, Henry Eitel, who was in charge of the funeral arrangements, to let him know that the city was prepared to conduct the funeral and see that Riley was buried in his family's plot at the local cemetery, beside his father, mother, and brothers with the pomp and circumstance due him. But Volney T. Malott, president of the Crown Hill Cemetery Association, had already called a special meeting on Sunday, and had extended to Eitel the offer of "one of the most beautiful sites in the cemetery." Eitel seemed inclined to accept and plans were made for a private service at the Lockerbie home, followed by a procession to Crown Hill, where the body would be temporarily placed in the Gothic Vault.

Governor Samuel Ralston wanted to give the public a chance to express its grief and wrote to Eitel: "James Whitcomb Riley was loved by the people of Indiana as was no other man. In an exceptionally tender sense the people of his native state felt and believed that he belonged to them, and they mourn—bitterly mourn—his passing. As governor of Indiana, I am anxious that the people be afforded an opportunity to show the high respect in which they held 'this man who sang of common things,' and I am moved therefore to suggest that his remains be allowed to lie in state in the rotunda of the Capitol between the hours of 3 p.m. and 9 p.m. Monday, July 24, 1916. Very respectfully yours, Samuel M. Ralston."

These plans were carried out and on Monday afternoon the bronze coffin, weighing 1,200 pounds, in which Riley lay, dressed in a white suit, was moved from Lockerbie Street to the Capitol, carried to and from the hearse by eight "stalwart policemen," and accompanied by Governor Ralston and Mayor Bell. Upwards of 35,000 passed by, the capitol staying open until 10 p.m. to accommodate them all.

The funeral took place at 2:30 the next afternoon in the Holstein house, 528 Lockerbie, where Riley had lived the last twenty five years of his life, with only relatives and intimate friends present. The Rev. Joseph A. Milburn of Sewanee, Tennessee, but a former pastor of Second Presbyterian Church and a close friend of Riley, began his long eulogy by reading Riley's poem "Away." When this service was concluded, the casket was carried to the white hearse which led the procession to the cemetery, where an "immense crowd" had been gathering around the Gothic Vault since early afternoon. A committee representing the 100 prominent citizens who had planned his birthday celebration in 1915 had made sure that "instead of a cold, bleak vault," the chapel had become a "flower-decked and decorated crypt." "The interior of the vault...was fittingly adorned to receive its most honored guest. Turkish rugs were spread on the gray and white marble floor, in the center of which rose the gray bier. Palms and boxwood trees and bay trees were banked in the corners, and in the marble niches, high up toward the Gothic vaulted roof, were white marble urns filled with pink gladiolus and ferns. The walls were a soft, brilliant mass of flowers."

"When the funeral cortege swept into view down the curving path leading from the great gates of the cemetery to the vault, the crowd fell back. And it is a curious thing that, just as the flag draped hearse came to a stop outside the chapel the rain began to fall—while the sun shone. Down came the rain, flashing like diamonds in the sun, while a rainbow spread its gorgeous arc across the sky for the briefest space of time. It was not a gloomy shower, but half smiles and half tears." *Indianapolis Star*, Wednesday, July 26, 1916.

There was just a brief service inside the chapel, again led by Rev. Milburn, and then "quietly the crowd dispersed and left the poet to his long sleep."

With the dignity of the funeral passed and the body in its temporary resting place in the Gothic Chapel, Greenfield began an emotional campaign to become its permanent home. The extent of their emotions may be revealed in the dateline of the *Greenfield Republican* which reported these events. It reads: "Greenfield, Ind. Thursday, July 27, 1916." The Greenfield City Council met on Wednesday night and gave their own proclamation: "Resolved, whereas, Greenfield has lost by death her honored son, James Whitcomb Riley, and wishing to demonstrate to the family and friends of the deceased the very high estimate in which he was held in the hearts of his fellow townsmen by granting to his representatives the exclusive right to occupy the most valued and favored spot in Park Cemetery, called The Mound, as the last resting place, overlooking Brandywine Creek, made famous by Mr. Riley and being close to the last resting place of his father, mother, brother, and sister; therefore be it. ...Approved by me this 26th day of July, 1916, Jonathan Q. Johnson, Mayor."

Riley himself had bought the lot next to his parent's graves on January 23, 1896, and some offered that as proof that he himself had intended to be buried there. He left no will and gave no explicit instructions about his burial, but, according to Greenfield's townsmen, "his wish to be buried on the family lot with his father and mother, brothers and sisters," was well known. The paper included many eloquent pleas on behalf of Greenfield: "He belonged to the human family, wherever love, sympathy and kindness are found. But he cannot be buried everywhere and he must be buried somewhere. Let that place be the most appropriate place,—in Greenfield. The place where he was born; where he purchased the old home in which he was born and kept it until his death, where his tomb would overlook the beautiful valley of the "Old Brandywine" and even the "Old Swimmin' Hole" ; near the grave of his old friend, "Buck Keefer, who set in type the first poem of his ever printed and whose funeral he attended only a week before his own death, and in the same cemetery in which rests the body of his boyhood friend, George A. Carr, on the occasion of whose death he wrote his last poem.... He may have been the poet of Indiana, but he was Greenfield's poet in a sense that he was the poet of no other people or place. He lived in the city but he did not love the city. He did not write of the city. He wrote of the country....In the fields, along the streams, down the dusty roads were the subjects about which he wrote, and they covered experiences of that period in his life spent in and around Greenfield.... "That Old Sweetheart of Mine" was a Greenfield ideal. "But, ah! So sadder than yourself am I, Who have no child to die" was written to

a Greenfield mother on the occasion of the death of an only daughter. Can Indianapolis, with its beautiful Crown Hill lay any such claims as these to the body of James Whitcomb Riley? No. It would be wrong to bury him anywhere but in Greenfield. Here is where he, without doubt, wanted to be buried. Here people will come to see his birthplace. Here is where they will come to see the "Old Swimmin' Hole" and here is where they should come to see his tomb."

In a "Mass Meeting" of Hancock County citizens, Miss Elizabeth Harris "talked about Greenfield being the place which Mr. Riley expected to be his final resting place. Not that he probably (sic) ever said so in just so many words, but the inference from his acts and what he did say all led to that conclusion. She called attention to the fact there appeared to be no question about his burial place even after he died, until certain Indianapolis influences began in what seemed to be a selfish or commercial effort in behalf of Crown Hill." Former Greenfield Mayor, John Eagan, listening to the sentiment of the crowd for Riley, contrasted that sentiment with "that selfish commercial spirit of Indianapolis people who sought the interment at Crown Hill for merely cold-blooded mercenary purposes."

A committee was appointed to go to Indianapolis and confer with state and city officials, as well as Riley's remaining relatives, regarding burial at Greenfield. But apparently the pull of The Hill was greater than the pull of The Mound and those closest to Riley in his final years prevailed. As Meredith Nicholson, who had known Riley for over thirty years pointed out, it was in Indianapolis that Riley had chosen to live for so many years and where he had actually written those poems held so dear by Greenfield's citizens. Nor were all of his poems about Greenfield subjects. Had he not written poems entitled "Lockerbie Street" and even "At Crown Hill" as well? And no matter what his old friends from Greenfield had inferred about where he wanted to be buried, Riley himself had once written, "When I die, I expect to wake right up again in Indianapolis, and though I have heard Heaven very highly spoken of, I will more than likely remark: 'Well, boys, you hain't overdrawed the pictur' ary particle.'"

Plans for permanent entombment at Crown Hill went ahead. On October 7, 1916, a group of actors and actresses performing a play based on Riley's poems at the English Theater, placed floral wreaths at the Gothic Chapel where his body still lay. According to cemetery records, he was not finally laid to rest at the summit of Crown Hill until one year later, on October 6, 1917. The open canopied monument was erected within a few years, although the earliest pictures do not include the stairs on the east and west sides.

(As a footnote, I must add, that while Park Cemetery in Greenfield is a very attractive cemetery, the view of Brandywine Creek is much obscured by trees and the most prominent feature to be seen from the mound today is the town's sewage treatment plant just across the cemetery fence, only partially hidden by a row of pines.)

The following poem, said by some to have been written for his brother, was read by Rev. Milburn at the beginning of Riley's funeral service

Away

I can not say, and I will not say
That he is dead.—He is just away!

With a cheery smile, and a wave of the hand,
He has wandered into an unknown land.

And left us dreaming how very fair
It needs must be, since he lingers there.

And you—O you, who the wildest yearn
For the old-time step and the glad return,—

Think of him faring on, as dear
In the love of There as the love of Here;

And loyal still, as he gave the blows
Of his warrior strength to his country's foes.—

Mild and gently, as he was brave,—
When the sweetest love of his life he gave

To simple things:—Where the violets grew
Blue as the eyes they were likened to,

The touches of his hands have strayed
As reverently as his lips have prayed:

When the little brown thrush that harshly chirred
Was dear to him as the mocking-bird;

And he pitied as much as a man in pain
A writhing honey-bee wet with rain.—

Think of him still as the same, I say:
He is not dead—he is just away!

Although written upon the occasion of the death of a friend, the following poem now seems particularly appropriate for Riley himself.

At Crown Hill

Leave him here in the fresh greening grasses and trees
And the symbols of love, and the solace of these—
The saintly white lilies and blossoms he keeps
In endless caress as he breathlessly sleeps.
The tears of our eyes wrong the scene of his rest,
For the sky's at its clearest—the sun's at its best—
The earth at its greenest—its wild bud and bloom
At its sweetest—and sweetest its honey'd perfume.
Home! Home!—Leave him here in his lordly estate,
And with never a tear as we turn from the gate!

Turn back to the home that will know him no more,—
The vines at the window—the sun through the door,—
Nor sound of his voice, nor the light of his face!...
But the birds will sing on, and the rose, in his place,
Will tenderly smile til we daringly feign
He is home with us still, though the tremulous rain
Of our tears reappear, and again all is bloom,
And all prayerless we sob in the long-darkened room.
Heaven portions it thus—the old mystery dim,—
It is midnight to us—it is morning to him.

The following poem was referred to by Greenfield's citizens as having been written for one of their own. It also supports the belief held by some that Riley regretted having never married and that his poems to and about children "were an attempt to counterweigh his bachelor state."

Bereaved

Let me come in where you sit weeping,—ay,
Let me, who have not any child to die,
Weep with you for the little one whose love
I have known nothing of.

The little arms that slowly, slowly loosed
Their pressure round your neck; the hands you used
To kiss.—Such arms—such hands I never knew,
May I not weep with you?

Fain would I be of service—say some thing
Between the tears, that would be comforting,—
But ah! so sadder than yourselves am I,
Who have no child to die.

The following poem also hints at a certain sadness about his state of life. A white hearse, such as was most often used to carry the bodies of children to their grave, carried Riley on his last ride from Lockerbie to Crown Hill.

The Little White Hearse

As the little white hearse went glimmering by—
The man on the coal-cart jerked his lines,
And smutted the lid of either eye,
And turned and stared at the business signs,
And the street-car driver stopped and beat
His hands on his shoulders, and gazed up-street
Till his eye on the long track reached the sky—
As the little white hearse went glimmering by.

As the little white hearse went glimmering by—
A stranger petted a ragged child
In the crowd walks, and she knew not why,
But he gave her a coin for the way she smiled;
And a boot-black thrilled with a pleasure strange
As a customer put back his change
With a kindly hand and a grateful sigh,
As the little white hearse went glimmering by.

As the the little white hearse went glimmering by—
A man looked out of a window dim,
And his cheeks were wet and his heart was dry,
For a dead child even was dear to him!
And he thought of his empty life, and said:
“Loveless alive, and loveless dead—
Nor wife nor child in earth or sky!”
As the little white hearse went glimmering by.

Out of Reach

You think them “out of reach,” your dead?
Nay, by my own dead, I deny
Your “out of reach.”—Be comforted:

'Tis not so far to die.

O by their dear remembered smiles
And outheld hands and welcoming speech,
They wait for us, thousands of miles
This side of "out of reach."

The following two poems are about two of Riley's fellow residents at Crown Hill. Riley served as a pallbearer at the funeral of Benjamin Harrison and Dan Paine was one of our earlier poets.

Mrs. Benjamin Harrison
Washington, October 25, 1892

Now utter calm and rest;
Hands folded o'er the breast
In peace the placidest,
 All trials past;
All fever soothed—all pain
Annuled in heart and brain
Never to vex again—
 She sleeps at last.

She sleeps; but O most dear
And beloved of her
Ye sleep not—nay, nor stir,
 Save but to bow
The closer to each,
With sobs and broken speech,
That all in vain beseech
 Her answer now.

And lo! we weep with you,
One grief the wide world through;
Yet with the faith she knew
 We see her still,
Even as here she stood—
All that was pure and good
And sweet in womanhood—
 God's will her will.

Dan Paine

Old friend of mine, whose chiming name
Has been the burthen of a rhyme
Within my heart since first I came
To know thee in thy mellow prime:
 With warm emotions in my breast
 That can but coldly be expressed,
 And hopes and wishes wild and vain,
 I reach my hand to thee, Dan Paine.
In fancy, as I sit alone
In gloomy fellowship with care,
I hear again thy cheery tone,
And wheel for thee an easy chair;
 And from my hand the pencil falls—
 My book upon the carpet sprawls,

As eager soul and heart and brain
Leap up to welcome thee, Dan Paine.

A something gentle in thy mien,
A something tender in thy voice,
Has made my trouble so serene,
I can but weep, from very choice.
 And even then my tears, I guess,
 Hold more of sweet than bitterness,
 And more of gleaming shine than rain,
 Because of thy bright smile, Dan Paine.

The wrinkles that the years have spun
And tangled round thy tawny face,
Are kinked with laughter, every one,
And fashioned in a mirthful grace.
 And though the twinkle of thine eyes
 Is keen as frost when Summer dies,
 It can not long as frost remain
 While thy warm soul shines out, Dan Paine.

And so I drain a health to thee:—
May merry Joy and jolly Mirth
Like children clamber on thy knee,
And ride thee round the happy earth!
 And when, at last, the hand of Fate
 Shall lift the latch of Canaan's gate,
 And usher me in thy domain,
 Smile on me just as now, Dan Paine.

Researched and written by Tom M. Davis, Crown Hill Cemetery Tour Developer and Guide

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James Whitcomb Riley's memorial is located at the peak of the "Crown," the highest hill in Marion County, with an elevation of 841.21 ft. From his memorial one can see the stunning 360-degree view of the entire Indianapolis skyline. This is a popular destination for the thousands of visitors who come to Crown Hill each year, and is featured on many of our weekend public tours as the perfect location to watch the sunset.

*For more information about Mr. Riley, contact the James Whitcomb Riley Museum Home, located at 528 Lockerbie St., Indianapolis, IN 46202. (317) 631-5885. www.rileykids.org/museum
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