

## **Sarah Josepha Hale**

Sarah Josepha Buell was born in Newport, NH in the family homestead located on East Mountain, October 23, 1789. Her parents were Revolutionary War Capt. Gordon Buell and Martha Whittlesay Buell. Young ladies did not attend college, but Sarah was educated by her mother and brother, Horatio, who taught her what he learned at Dartmouth. In 1813, Sarah married David Hale a lawyer and Freemason. She continued her private studies, but was widowed in 1822 with five children under the age of seven to support. She attempted having a millinery shop for a short time. She also taught school in Guild. With the help of her husband's Freemason's Lodge who paid for the publication, she wrote her first book of poems, *The Genius of Oblivion* and soon after, her first novel *Northwood*, about a Yankee Thanksgiving. Sarah is famous through the generations for writing "Mary had a Little Lamb." The entire poem was published in *Poems for Children* in 1830-31. Sarah claimed that she wrote the book, not compiled it. Over the years, others such as Mary Sawyer Tyler claimed to have written the nursery rhyme. Sarah's publisher, Lowell Mason, published it in a song book giving credit to Sarah. Four days before her death, Sarah dictated a letter at the request of Mason, claiming authorship of the 1831 poem. The same year, 1827, that Sarah published her first book she became editor of *Ladies' Magazine* in Boston. It was the first magazine written for women. She remained there until 1836. In 1837, until 1877, she became editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*. She continued as the editor, and also writing until she was 90 years old. No early retirement for Sarah! During her career, Sarah was instrumental in persuading President Lincoln to declare Thanksgiving a National holiday in the US. It had previously been celebrated at different times in various states. She also helped raise money for the Bunker Hill Monument. As an editor, Sarah published the original American manuscripts to copyright in her magazine. Published in her magazine were the famous authors and poets of their day such as Longfellow, Poe, Catherine Sedgwick, and Alice Neal. Her editorial policy was conservative. She avoided controversial subjects. The Civil War was never mentioned, yet she opposed slavery. Her support for women was to make them better wives and mothers which she believed was women's most important career. She opposed the women's rights movement as an attempt to take women away from the home front. Yet, even with this attitude, Sarah promoted education and outside careers for women in industry and missionary medicine. When the women's rights movement gained support, *Godey's Magazine* began to decline. The magazine folded 21 years after

Sarah's retirement. Sarah has been criticized by the feminist scholars, yet she did play a role in women's lives by providing them with a magazine in which they could get ideas and expressed themselves; stressing education, and oh yes, encouraging them to learn how to swim. It was good exercise and they might fall off one of those new fangled steamboats. Sarah Josepha Hale died March 30, 1879 aged 90. She is buried in Laurel Hill Cemetery in Philadelphia. Every year Friends of Newport (NH) Library give a medal in her name to an outstanding writer chosen by their committee. References: Domestic Goddesses by Lisa Niles, Univ. of Central Oklahoma, update 2007; "\Widow with Five Children, Sarah Josepha Hale", News Leader, 11/28/98; NH American Guide Series, Federal Writers Project, WPA, 1938; "NH Woman led crusade for holiday of Thanksgiving," Ann Kim, Union Leader, 11/25/99."Hale Advanced Thanksgiving, Women's Skill" by Lisa Singhanian, Union Leader, 11/28/1996. "Sarah Josepha Hale" fm Wikipedia, the Free encyclopedia..