

Death of an Old Carriage Horse ^[1]

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George Moses Horton was born into slavery in North Carolina around the turn of the nineteenth century. After teaching himself to read, he became a well-known poet in the Chapel Hill area, commissioning many poems for UNC students to give to their sweethearts. Horton was the first African American to publish a book and remains the only person to have published a book while enslaved.

Although Horton worked as a laborer on UNC's campus and sold poems there as well in an effort to buy his freedom, it was not until Horton walked to Raleigh with the liberating Union army in April 1865 that Horton was freed.

*During his time with the Union army, Horton wrote the poems that would be published together as *Naked Genius*. The poem below, "Death of an Old Carriage Horse" was one of the poems included in *Naked Genius*.*

I was a harness horse,

Constrained to travel weak or strong,

With orders from oppressing force,

Push along, push along.

I had no space of rest,

And took at forks the roughest prong,

Still by the cruel driver pressed,

Push along, push along.

Vain strove the idle bird,

To charm me with her artless song,

But pleasure lingered from the word,

Push along, push along.

The order of the day

Was push, the peal of every tongue,

The only word was all the way,

Push along, push along.

Thus to my journey's end,

Had I to travel right or wrong,

'Till death my sweet and favored friend,

Bade me from life to push along.

--[George Moses Horton](#) [2], an enslaved African American poet in Chatham County, North Carolina.

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