

The Fireside Poets

America's First Literary Stars

We watched the first red blaze appear,
Heard the sharp crackle, caught the gleam
On whitewashed wall and sagging beam,
Until the old, rude-furnished room
Burst, flower-like, into rosy bloom;
While radiant with a mimic flame
Outside the sparkling drift became,
And through the bare-boughed lilac-tree
Our own warm hearth seemed blazing free.

from *Snow-bound*, John Greenleaf Whittier

What are the Fireside Poets?

- First group of American poets to rival British poets in popularity in either country.
- Notable for their scholarship and the resilience of their lines and themes.
- Preferred conventional forms over experimentation.
- Often used American legends and scenes of American life as their subject matter.

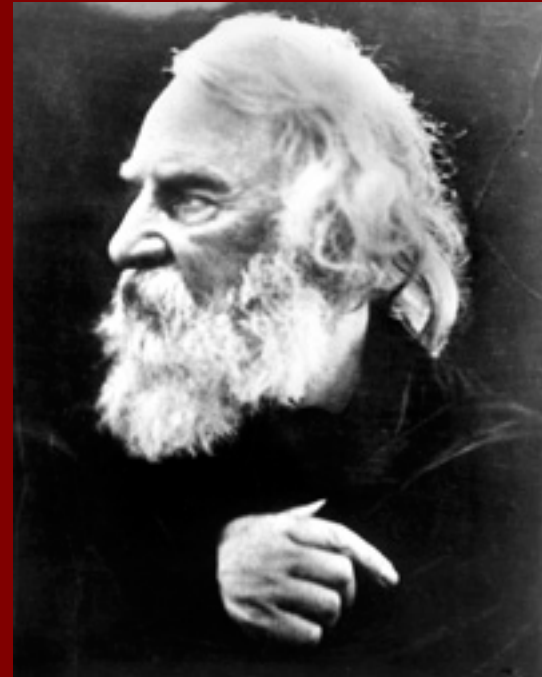
Who were the Fireside Poets?

- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
- William Cullen Bryant
- James Russell Lowell
- Oliver Wendell Holmes
- John Greenleaf Whittier



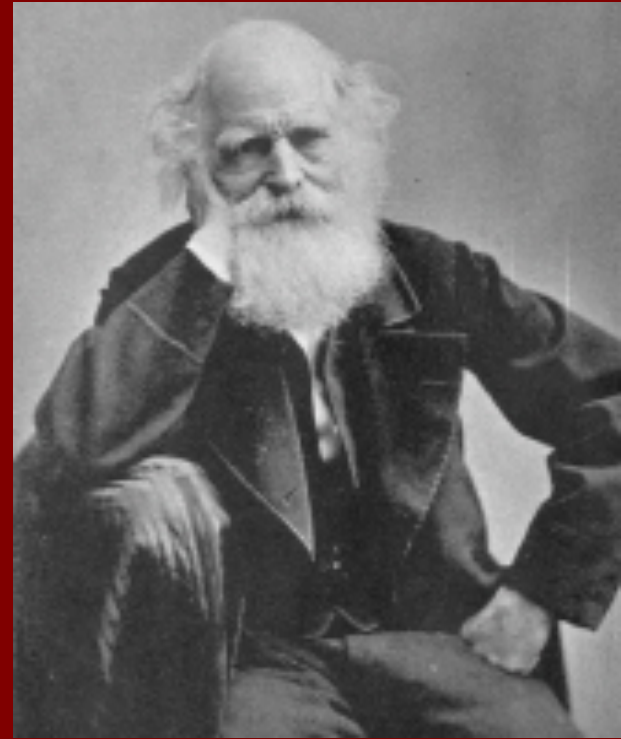
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

- 1807-1882
- Composed *Song of Hiawatha*, *Paul Revere's Ride* and *Evangeline*.
- Translated Dante's *Inferno* from Italian into English



William Cullen Bryant

- 1794-1878
- Composed “Thanatopsis”
- One of the founders of the Republican party and supporter of Lincoln



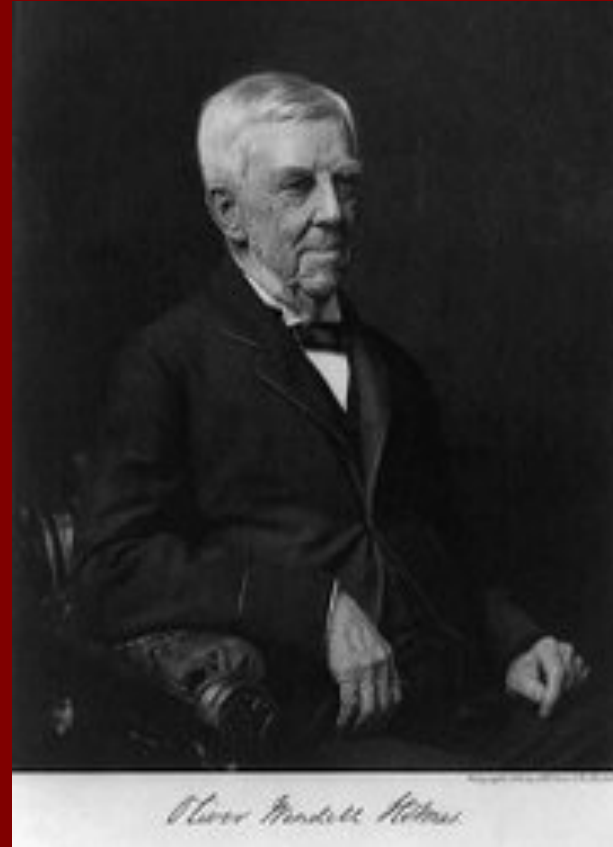
James Russell Lowell

- 1819-1891
- Of the prominent Boston Brahmin Lowell family
- Active in anti-slavery causes



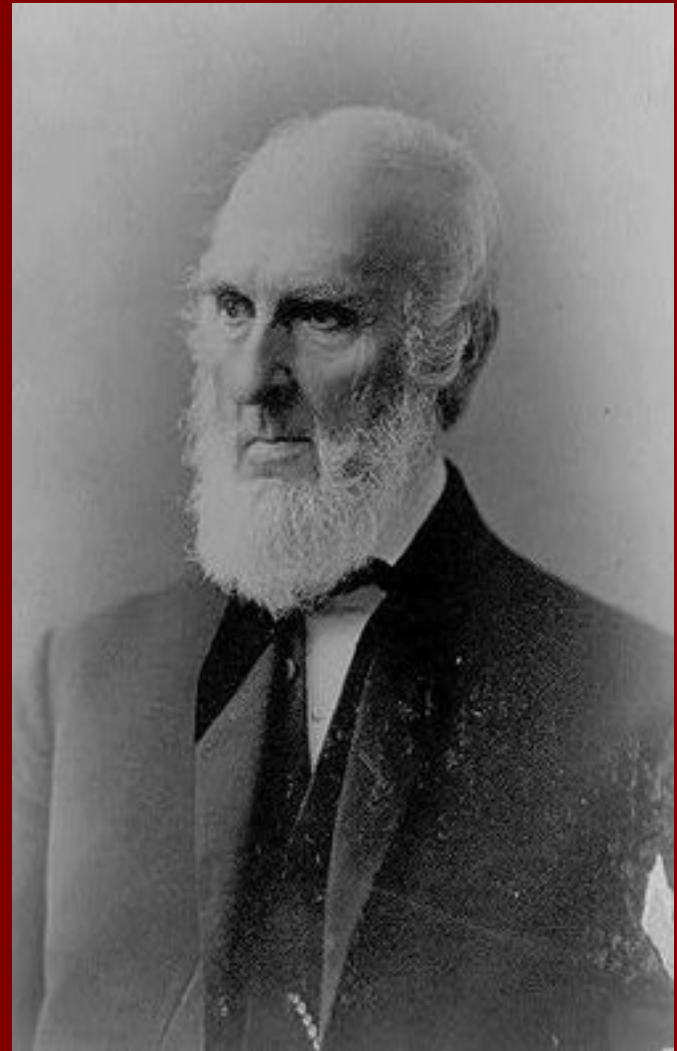
Oliver Wendell Holmes

- 1809-1894
- Medical doctor – invented the term “anesthesia.”
- Composed “Old Ironsides,” which saved the U.S.S. Constitution from the scrapyard
- Father of Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.
- Wrote *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*



John Greenleaf Whittier

- 1807-1892
- Composed *Snow-bound* and *Legends of New England*
- Active in anti-slavery movement



Lasting Impact

- Longfellow remained the most popular American poet for decades. When Poe criticized him, he was all but ostracized. Longfellow remains the only American poet to be immortalized by a bust in Westminster Abbey's Poets' Corner
- They took on causes in their poetry, such as the abolition of slavery, which brought the issues to the forefront in a palatable way.
- Through their scholarship and editorial efforts, they paved the way for later Romantic writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman.