Biography of James Parton, Father of the Modern Biography

James Parton (1822-1891) was born in Canterbury, England on the 9th of February 1822. His family moved to America when he was five years old., studied in New York City and White Plains, New York, and was a schoolmaster in Philadelphia and then in New York. He removed (1875) to Newburyport, Massachusetts, where he died on the 17th of October 1891. Parton was the most popular biographer of his day in America. His most important books are biographies of Horace Greeley, Aaron Burr, Andrew Jackson, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and Voltaire. He authored other historical works as well.

His first wife, Sara (1811–1872), sister of Nathaniel Parker Willis, and widow of Charles H. Eldredge (d. 1846), attained considerable popularity as a writer under the pen-name Fanny Fern. They were married in 1856. Her works include the novels, *Ruth Hall* (1854), reminiscent of her own life, and *Rose Clark* (1857); and several volumes of sketches and stories.

Parton moved to Newburyport in 1875 and lived at 270 High Street. He then purchased 272 High Street and eventually moved into that majestic Federal mansion.

In 1876 Parton married Ellen Willis Eldredge, his first wife's daughter, by her first husband, Charles Eldredge. His adopted daughter, Ethel, the daughter of Grace Eldrege (Fanny Fern's daughter) and writer Mortimer Thomson (also known as Philander Doesticks), was adopted by Parton in 1872, and she later adopted Parton's last name. Ethel Parton became a famous writer of children's books about 19th century life in Newburyport, MA, published in the 1930s and 1940s.

James and Ellen had two children, Hugo and Mabel. Hugo's children (James Parton's actual grandchildren) were James Parton and Niké (pronounced Ni-KAY, not like the shoes) Parton. James Parton (1912-2001) was founder and publisher of American Heritage and Horizon Magazines. Niké Parton (1922-2005) was a prominent Florida artist.

Parton died October 17th, 1891, on a Saturday in Newburyport after suffering a few weeks of illness.

Author of books:

Life of Horace Greeley (1855, biography)
Life and Times of Aaron Burr (1857, biography)
Life of Andrew Jackson (1859–60, biography, 3 vols.)
General Butler in New Orleans (1863, history)
Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin (1864, biography, 2 vols.)
Famous Americans of Recent Times (1867)
The Peoples Book of Biography (1868)
Triumphs of Enterprise, Ingenuity, and Public Spirit (1871)
Life of Thomas Jefferson (1874, biography)
Le Parnasse Français (1877)
Life of Voltaire (1881, biography, 2 vols.)
Noted Women of Europe and America (1883)
Captains of Industry (1884–91, juvenile, 2 series)
Some Noted Princes, Authors, and Statesmen of Our Time (1885)

References

Chisholm, Hugh, ed (1911). *Encyclopædia Britannica* (eleventh ed.). Cambridge University Press.