

# PAL: Perspectives in American Literature - A Research and Reference Guide - An Ongoing Project

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## Chapter 4: James Freeman Clarke (1810-1888)

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Source: [Unitarians . . . .](#)

James Freeman Clarke was a Unitarian minister, author, editor, and member of the Transcendental Club. Through reading Samuel Taylor Coleridge he became acquainted with Immanuel Kant and discovered that he "was born a transcendentalist." He graduated from Harvard Divinity School in 1832 and immediately moved to Louisville, Kentucky to help establish liberal religion in the West. There he helped found the first Transcendentalist periodical, the *Western Messenger*, and served as its editor from April 1836 to April 1839. This magazine advocated the liberal tradition in religious thought, supported German literature, defended the views of Amos Bronson Alcott, and printed important Transcendentalist texts—including the first poetry published by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Clarke closely studied German works, especially those of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and translated Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette for George Ripley's *Specimens of Foreign Standard Literature* in 1842. With his sister Sarah Ann Clarke and Margaret Fuller, he participated in Fuller's famous trip to the Great Lakes in 1843. - [Alcott.net](#)

### Primary Work

*The Letters of James Freeman Clarke to Margaret Fuller*. Ed. Wesley J. Thomas. Hamburg, Germany: Cram de Gruyter, 1957.

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### James Freeman Clarke: A Brief Biography

#### A Student Project by Melanie Moore

James Freeman Clarke was born on April 4th, 1810 in New Hampshire. At age 10 he went to Boston Latin school where after a short struggle he began to excel. In 1825 Clarke entered Harvard College, he was 15. He became friends with William Henry Channing during his school years at Harvard. In his last year at Harvard he became friends with Sarah Margret Fuller and was learning from men such as Coleridge and Carlyle..

After Harvard Clarke enrolled in Divinity School at Cambridge. He was unhappy there in his first year. He left the school in 1830 after his first year because of financial difficulties. Clarke returned to Divinity School the next year. He and Margret Fuller decided to study German together. Throughout his life Margret Fuller was a companion and an inspiration to Clarke. They corresponded and studied together. In July 1833 Clarke finished school at Divinity and was ordained on July 21st.

Clarke went west to Kentucky to preach and felt he might have to give up his Philosophy and perhaps intellectualism all together. Clarke met other individuals interested in the same literature as himself and went on with his philosophies . These individuals such as : James Perkins, Ephraim Peabody, Edward Cranch and William Elliot all became contributors to the first Transcendental Journal, called *The Western Messenger*.

Clarke was also a member of the "Transcendental Club" which was began in 1836 and sporadically existed until 1848. Two years after joining this club, on August 15, 1839 Clarke married Anna Huidekoper, whom Margret Fuller was very jealous of and had 4 children(119 Bolster).

Clarke , unlike the other members of the "Transcendental Club" did not join Brook Farm. He did, however, purchase Brook Farm in 1885 hoping to start another social and literary society which also failed.

Clarke preached throughout his life and lived well into his eighties. He tried politics as a way of making the world better as well as his philosophy and preaching. He died peacefully with his youngest child and his wife at his bedside.

Clarke's main works include: 32 books mainly concerning theology, almost 50 sermons and essays, and 25 published tracts in the American Unitarian Association series. He was editor to various publications such as *The Western Messenger* and *Christian World*. Clarke also contributed to many other periodicals (364 Bolster).

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Thomas, Wesley John. *James Freeman Clarke Apostle of German Culture to America*. Boston: John W. Luce & Company Publishers, 1949.

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