



## Ambrose Bierce

Topic Guide for Chronicling America (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>)

### Introduction

Ambrose Bierce (1842-c. 1914) was an American journalist and writer whose style was marked by satire and realism. He was born in Meigs County, Ohio and spent his childhood in Kosciusko County, Indiana. In 1861, he enlisted in the Union Army as part of the 9th Indiana Volunteer Infantry Regiment. He spent much of his adult life in San Francisco, California, where he contributed to and edited several local newspapers and journals. He was nicknamed "the wickedest man in San Francisco" and "Bitter Bierce" due to his brutal honesty, sardonic wit and pessimism. Many of his works, some inspired by his military experiences, first appeared in newspapers, including the short story "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" and excerpts of *The Devil's Dictionary* (also known as *The Cynic's Word Book*). His death date is uncertain. He was last known to have been in Chihuahua, Mexico, in 1913, where he had been observing Pancho Villa's army during the Mexican Revolution.

### Important Dates

- June 24, 1842: Ambrose Gwinnett Bierce is born in Meigs County, Ohio, the tenth of 13 children.
- c. 1857-1859: Bierce is a printer's apprentice for the *Northern Indianan*, an antislavery newspaper.
- 1861-1866: Bierce serves in the United States Army.
- 1868: Bierce becomes the editor of the *San Francisco News Letter*.
- December 25, 1871: Bierce marries Mary Ellen "Mollie" Day.
- 1872-1875: Bierce and his family live in England, later returning to San Francisco.
- 1872: Bierce's first book of sketches, *Nuggets and Dust Panned Out in California*, is published.
- 1890: "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" is published in the *San Francisco Examiner*.
- 1891: *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians*, a collection of Civil War era short stories, is published.
- 1892: *Black Beetles in Amber*, a collection of poetry, is published.
- 1906: *The Devil's Dictionary*, containing satirical definitions of English words, is published.
- December 26, 1913: In Mexico, Bierce writes his last known communication before disappearing.

### Suggested Search Strategies

- Search "Ambrose Bierce" as a phrase or in proximity to find works written about or by Bierce.
- Try searching the names of his literary works in proximity or as phrases: An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge, Devil's Dictionary, Tales of Soldiers and Civilians, Fantastic Fables, Shapes of Clay.
- Bierce was well-known, so be sure to search newspapers from all states.

### Sample Articles from Chronicling America

- "[An Heiress from Redhorse](#)" *Belmont Chronicle* (St. Clairsville, OH), June 11, 1891, Image 1, col. 6.
- "[The Degeneracy of Ambrose Bierce](#)" *San Francisco Call* (San Francisco, CA), October 20, 1895, Image 18, col. 5-6.
- "[With the Coffee](#)" *Salt Lake Herald* (Salt Lake City, UT), June 11, 1897, Image 7, col. 1-2.
- "[Killed at Resaca](#)" *Enterprise* (Wellington, OH), October 19, 1898, Image 3, col. 1.
- "[Ambrose Bierce's Word Etchings of War](#)" *Sun* (New York, NY), July 28, 1918, Image 59.
- "['Bitter Bierce,' Who Vanished](#)" *Sun* (New York, NY), January 25, 1920, Image 64, col. 1.