Benjamin Penhallow Shillaber Biography

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Biography

Benjamin Penhallow Shillaber (12 July 1814-25 November 1890), journalist and humorist, left his Portsmouth, New Hampshire, home to become a printer's helper in Boston. He joined the Boston *Post* and in 1847 catapulted to literary fame by his creation, "Mrs. Partington." The forte of this widow lady was poetry--bad poetry--and her prose was sprinkled with numerous malapropisms. The "Mrs. Partington" sketches appeared in newspapers and magazines, including his own short-lived comic weekly, the *Carpet Bag* (1852), and "her" first book appeared in 1854 as *The Life and Sayings of Mrs. Partington* (New York: J. C. Derby), quickly selling 30,000 copies. In subsequent years Shillaber edited magazines, wrote juveniles, and published his own humorous verse. He died in Chelsea, Massachusetts. Mark Twain, whose first published sketch appeared in the *Carpet Bag*, is thought to have been influenced by the "Mrs. Partington" character in writing *Tom Sawyer*.