# Robert Hare Biography

## Robert Hare

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# Biography

Robert Hare (1781-1858), considered the leading American chemist of his time, was a productive inventor and writer.

Robert Hare was born in Philadelphia on Jan. 17, 1781, the son of a prominent businessman and state senator. He was educated at home, then studied chemistry under James Woodhouse. While managing his father's brewery, he found time for chemical research and gained international fame in 1801 with his invention of the oxyhydrogen blowpipe, which provided the highest degree of heat then known. (Its application led to the founding of new industries such as production of platinum and limelight illuminants.)

After teaching briefly at the College of William and Mary in Virginia, Hare was appointed professor of chemistry at the University of Pennsylvania in 1818, where he remained until 1847. Hare's classes were noted for his spectacular experiments. His inventions included a calorimeter, a deflagrator for producing high electric currents, and an improved electric furnace for producing artificial graphite and other substances.

Although primarily noted as an experimental chemist and inventor of experimental apparatus, Hare was keenly interested in theoretical speculations about both chemistry and meteorology. He published articles in the *American Journal of Science,* edited by his close friend and collaborator Benjamin Silliman. His famous controversies were with Jöns J. Berzelius over chemical nomenclature, Michael Faraday over electricity, and William C. Redfield over the nature of storms. Hare was especially committed to the theory of the materiality of heat.

In 1850 Hare published a historical novel, *Standish the Puritan*. In 1854, near the end of his career, he became a convert to spiritualism, much to the dismay of his rationally minded colleagues. He produced a book on the subject and went so far as to claim that Benjamin Franklin's spirit had validated his electrical theories. But he was unsuccessful in getting the American Association for the Advancement of Science to listen to his views.

Hare was a member of the American Philosophical Society and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Though his only degrees were honorary, he represented the newly emerging professional university scientist in contrast to the traditional gentleman-amateur.

Hare had married Harriet Clark in September 1811; one son, John James Clark Hare, became a distinguished lawyer. Hare died on May 15, 1858.