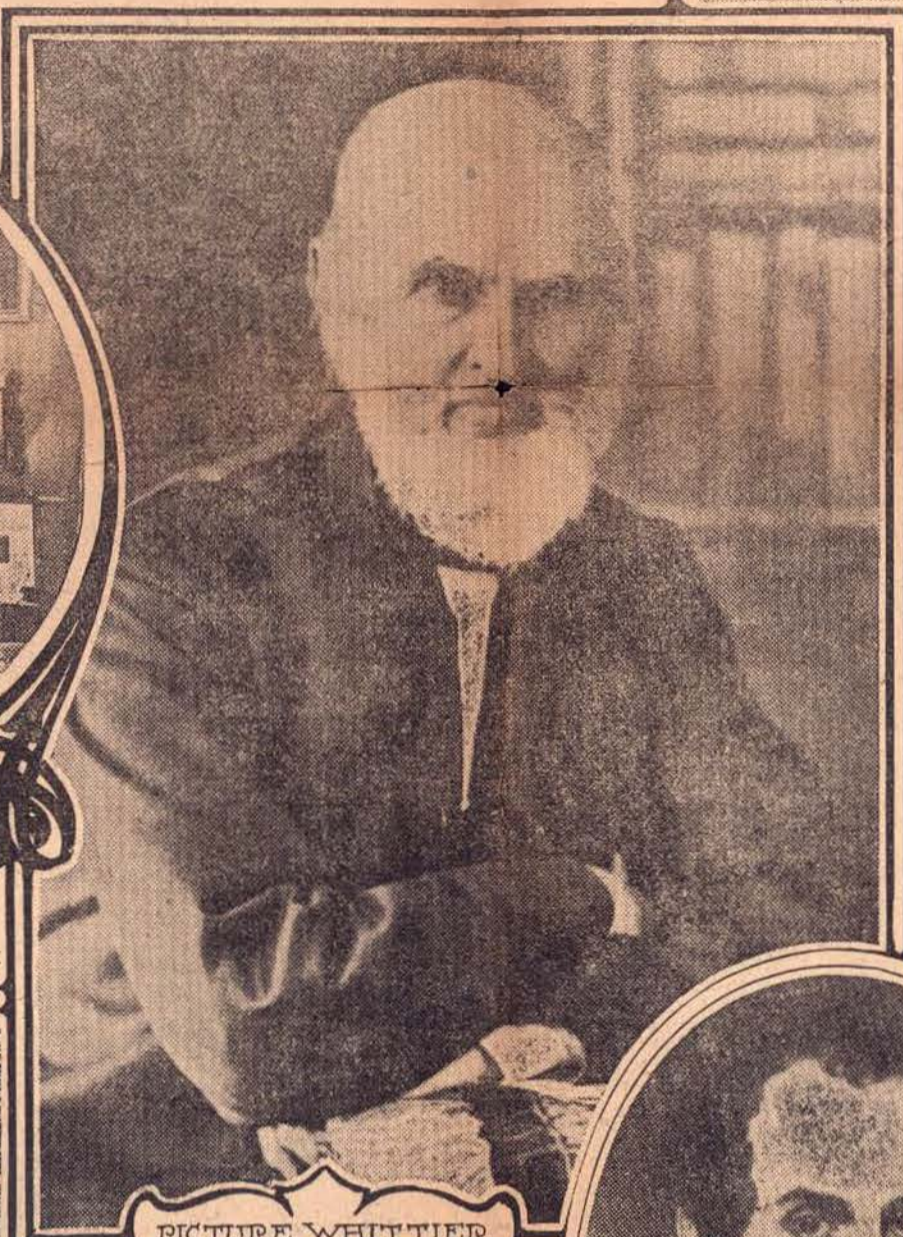


Centenary of the Bobby Burns of New England

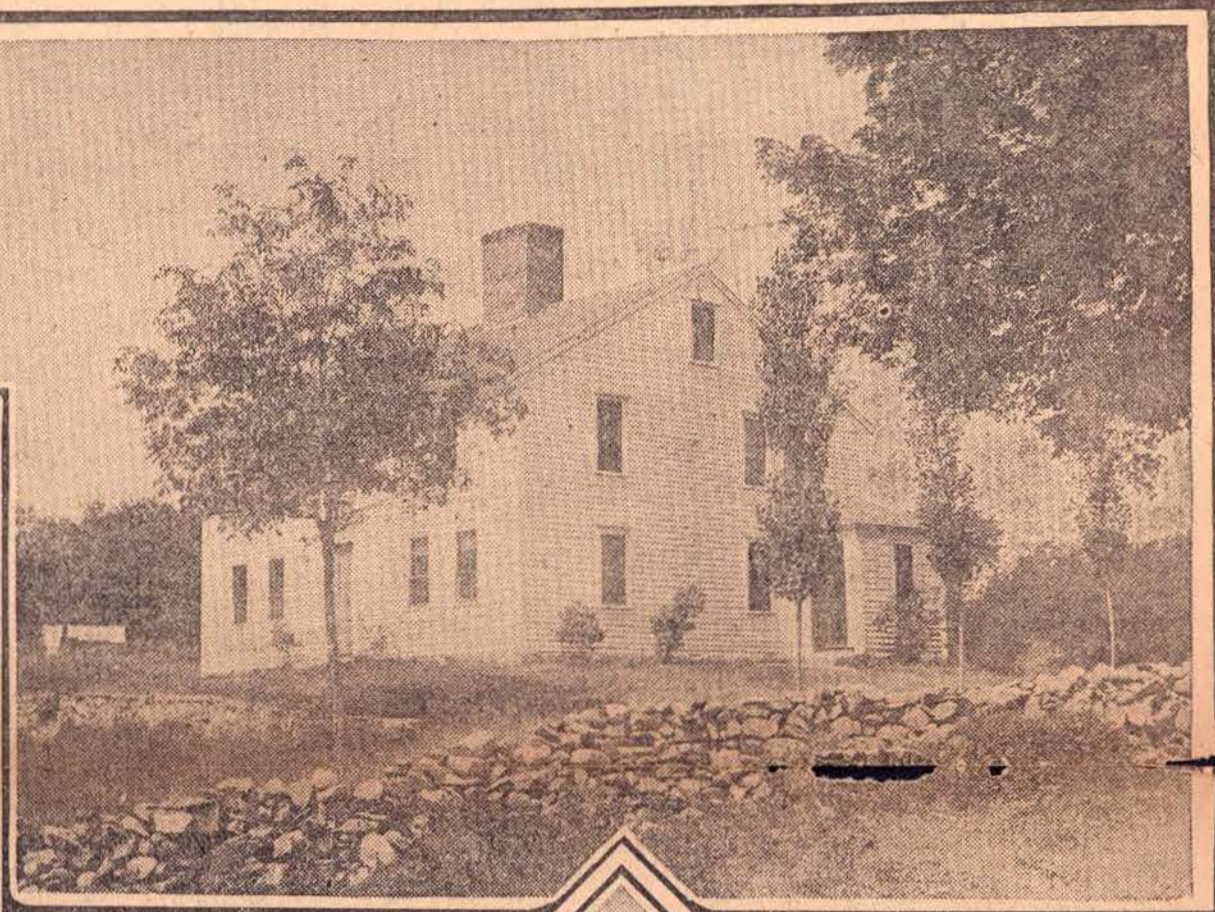
Celebration of Hundredth Anniversary of Birth of John G. Whittier Will Establish Him Firmer Than Ever as Poet of Common People, and One of Most Effective Forces for Abolition of Slavery.



LIBRARY IN AMESBURY WHITTIER HOUSE



PICTURE WHITTIER HIMSELF THOUGHT BEST



WHITTIER BIRTHPLACE,

EAST HAVERHILL



OAK KNOLL, WHITTIER HOME AT DANVERS

THERE'S no John Greenleaf Whittier in New England today—and that is large reason why the centenary of the birth of the author of "Snow Bound" and "Tent on the Beach" is an interesting event in December history. Whittier was born in East Haverhill, Dec. 17, 1807. He died only 15 years ago this autumn.

It is intended by the various Whittier societies throughout the state and by individual lovers of the gentle poet to make the centenary day memorable by gatherings at Oak Knoll, Amesbury and East Haverhill and, if possible, by exercises in the public schools. Born and bred New Englanders wish to make this first centenary a precedent for future recognitions of the place of John Greenleaf Whittier in New England life and thought.

It is in New England, of course, more than in any other part of the country that Whittier's memory is cherished. He sang of New England nature and life. The essays have frequently likened him to Robert Burns and, perhaps, that classification is what Whittier himself would have liked posterity to accept.

Everybody knows something about Whittier. Even the street boy has probably heard of "Maud Muller." Going farther up the scale, nearly every high school boy has heard of "Snow Bound." And in the universities "Tent on the Beach" is read. The story of "Barbara Freetch," as Whittier has told it, belongs in the realm of common, general knowledge.

For those reasons, plus, of course, many subtler and stronger reasons, Whittier's centenary will make for itself in the events of the December calendar a place which will receive more than transient consideration.

"In the early 19th century," writes George Rice Carpenter in his biography of Whittier, "New England, that part of the land in which intellectual and spiritual life among the common people had been most continuous and vigorous, was thoroughly fertilized, as it were, by generations of mental activity, and was ready to bear the natural fruit of the vitalized soil—the man of letters, the man who fashions, in visible speech and in the mysterious forms of the imagination, the latent ideals and aspirations of his dumb fellows."

Going on to speak of the New England writers who evolved from that epoch, Mr. Carpenter refers to Whittier. "Of them all, Whittier was the most widely and profoundly and permanently representative of the common people of his locality. . . . His habits, his circumstances and all his interests bound him to the land and life of the people. . . . Whittier alone was country born and bred, a country man in education and sympathies: A Haverhill boy, an Amesbury man, he never broke himself the slightest ties that bound him to his family and his neighbors. His power of expression was his own, but his life and his thoughts were as theirs, and he thus became directly typical of his town and his district, and indirectly typical of all the country folk of his race and his nation who lived the same simple life based on the old polity of the Puritan community."

In East Haverhill, the house in which Whittier was born is still standing. It is an old-fashioned New England farmhouse, and today it is occupied

by the Whittier Society, and among its treasures are many personal belongings of the poet. It was a plain, commonplace, typical New England home.

Meanwhile we did our nightly chores—
Brought in the wood from out of doors,
Littered the sheds, and from the mows
Raked down the herd's grass for the cows;
Heard the horse whinnying for his corn,
And, sharply clashing horns on horns,
Impatient down the stanchion rows,
The cattle shake their walnut bows;
While peering from his early perch
Upon the scaffold's pole of birch,
The cock his crested helmet bent
And down his querulous challenge sent.

Whittier's people were old-fashioned New Englanders—the bred-in-the-bone, New England types. His ancestors had made their homes in Essex county since 1647. The Whittiers had even lived in the raftered home for more than a century. They had built it shortly after King Philip and his warriors ceased to be nightmares. It was rough-hewn and plain, but there were memories and associations in every corner of it; of itself, it was an expression of heredity. It was a limited environment, this sort of life into which the future poet of the new England came. His parents were Friends, and as some of the students of the religious and social thought of the other days like to think, an advanced element among the Puritanic population.

The tenets of the Quakers had, of course, considerable influence in determining the upbringing of young Whittier. He was destined to follow in the footsteps of those who had gone before him. Aspirations had no part in the code of Whittier, Senior. This stern father had had the misfortune to marry late in life. He had become settled in his attitude toward humility and contentment. And so he warned his sons against trying to overreach themselves. Whittier's mother was the typical Quakeress—a simple woman, extremely devout, extremely loving. It was from her, say his biographers, that he inherited the emotional faculties which helped to make him a poet. Otherwise, very likely he would have become a farmer or remained a cobbler.

Whittier once wrote to Samuel Pickard, one of his relatives and historians: "I think at the age of which thy note inquires, I found equal satisfaction in an old rural life, with the shifting panorama of the seasons, in reading the few books within my reach, and dreaming of something wonderful and grand somewhere in the future. Neither change nor loss had then made me realize the uncertainty of earthly things. I felt secure of my mother's love, and dreamed of losing nothing and gaining much. . . . I had at that time a great thirst for knowledge and little means to gratify it. The beauty of outward nature early impressed me, and the moral and spiritual beauty of the holy lives I read of in the Bible and other good books also affected me with a sense of my falling short and a longing for a better state."

Whittier obtained his early education in the winter sessions of the district school. He has sung of those pleasant periods of his life.

Still sits the schoolhouse by the road,
A ragged beggar sleeping;
Around it still the sunnycrows grow,
And blackberry vines are creeping.
Within, the master's desk is seen,

Deep scarred by raps official;
The warping floor, the battered seats,
The jack-knife's carved initial;

Long years ago a winter sun
Shone over it at setting;
Lit up its western window panes,
And low eave's a key fretting;

It touched the tangled golden curls,
And brown eyes full of grieving,
Of one who still her steps delayed,
While all the school were leaving;

For near her stood the little boy,
Her children's favor stung;
His cap pulled low upon a face,
Where pride and shame were mingled.

Pushing with restless feet the snow
To right and left, he leaved—
As restlessly her tiny hands
The blue-checked apron figured.

He saw her lift her eyes; he felt
The soft hand's light caressing,
And heard the tremble of her voice,
As if faint confessing.

"I'm sorry that I spelt the word;
I hate to go above you,
Because"—the brown eyes lower fell—
"Because, you see, I love you."

It was this schoolmaster who introduced poetry to young Whittier; the sort of poetry which Whittier came to love more intensely than any other kind—the songs of Robert Burns. It went home to the lad of 14, and he looked so longingly at the first volume which he had seen that the schoolmaster made him a very great present. Later in life Whittier acknowledged his debt to the Scot, telling in one of his finest lyrics, how "the older poet awoke the younger."

At this early age he began to write "Magg McGone." It was a very long poem for a child in the early teens to compose, and, very fittingly, it deals with an heroic type of the Indian, with "fringe among the leaves," "click at his gun," "hand of iron," "foot of cork," "a low, lean, swarthy fellow" and "the deep stern eye." This youthful effort was suggested, as Whittier himself said, when he had grown mature. "The idea of a big Indian in his paint strutting about in Sir Walter Scott's plaid

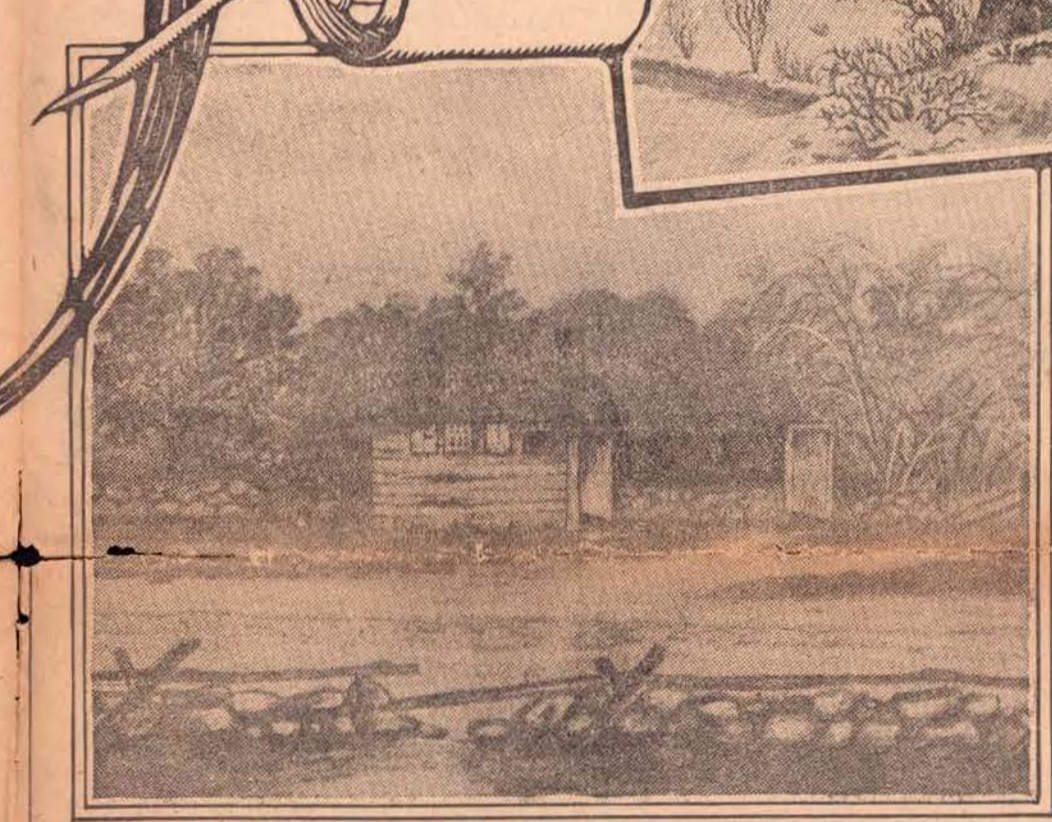


PAINTING OF WHITTIER IN WHITTIER HOME



WITCHES' WELL, OAK KNOLL

PAINTING OF WHITTIER'S HOME, SNOWBOUND, EAST HAVERHILL



WHERE WHITTIER WENT TO SCHOOL

By the time Whittier was 18, he was contributing regularly to the weeklies of the county. His first poem, which was published in William Lloyd Garrison's Newburyport paper, attracted immediate attention. It had been left by a carrier, Garrison, as he picked up the envelope, suspected another attempt at poetry from some life-long subscriber. So he opened it with a resigned manner—and then read about "The Exile's Departure." On June 8, 1826, the Newburyport Free Press gave to New England Whittier's first published poem. A second poem, entitled "The Dearly," was introduced by Garrison at Garrison's suggestion. Whittier entered the academy at Haverhill, supporting himself in the mean time by making slippers. "He calculated so closely every item of expense," writes one biographer, "that he knew at the beginning of the term that he would have 25 cents to spare at its close, and he actually had this sum of money in his pocket when his half-year of study was over. It was the rule of his whole life never to buy anything until he had the money in hand to pay for it, and although his income was small and uncertain until past middle-life, he was never in debt."

Whittier managed to remain in school a full year. He was now a frequent contributor of verse and prose to the newspapers, and his writings were copied throughout the country. For the first time he had access to libraries, and read voluminously. His local reputation, growing with nearly every new poem, made him a welcome visitor to homes of cultured Haverhill families and the best of Newburyport. At the age of 21, he was invited to sit in the

editorial chair of Collier's American Manufacturer, a Boston paper devoted to reform and humanitarianism. Whittier began his work on Jan. 1, 1829. At the same time, Mr. Collier announced that he had resigned from the editorship in favor of John Greenleaf Whittier, "who is well known to the public as a writer of much promise." The munificent wages of \$2 a week were promised the new editor. As a requisite he was invited to board with his employer.

In August, 1829, Whittier's father fell ill, and the son deemed it his duty to return to the farm. Out of the savings which he had made, he freed the homestead from debt. Until the summer of 1830, when his father died, he labored on the farm. In the mean time, he wrote verses frequently.

After his father's death, he took charge of the editorial chair of the Haverhill Gazette. In that position he wrote not only poetry, but editorials. His work attracted considerable attention. One admirer, George D. Prentiss of Hartford, editor of the New England Review, began to correspond with him. When Prentiss went to Kentucky to obtain material for a biography of Clay, he offered his position to Whittier. The latter accepted, and in July, 1830, began his task. Prentiss introduced him to the readers of the New England Review in this fashion:

"I cannot do less than congratulate my readers on the prospect of their more familiar acquaintance with a gentleman of such powerful energies and such excited purity and sweetness of character. I have made some enemies among those whose good opinion I value, but no rational man can ever be the enemy of Mr. Whittier."

In Hartford, Whittier fell in love with Miss Cornelia Russ. But she did not share his affection. His health became poor again and he returned to Haverhill suffering keenly from unbusiness. He soon published his first book, a poem of New England legendary life, entitled "Moll Pitcher." His scattered poems then amounted to 200.

In November, 1831, he gave the world his first anti-slavery verses, "To William Lloyd Garrison." To the cause of anti-slavery, Whittier gave himself up completely. He had, for a brief time, entertained an ambition to succeed Caleb Cushing in Congress. But with his conversion to the cause of abolition, his political friends fell away from him. At least, while they still admired his fine personality, they ceased to give his political ambitions any encouragement. The change in Whittier, much as it was deplored from the standpoint of expediency, was welcomed by lovers of his verse, for with his abolitionism came a different sort of verse—a more rugged, spirited poetry. In this era was written his poems as "Cousin Sam's Lecture," "The Call of the Christian," "The Female Martyr," "The Slave Ship," "Expatriation."

Unquestionably, his influence in the half of anti-slavery was tremendous. He appealed to the hearts of his readers, and there was no gaining the success of his messages.

By 1840, books of his poems were household property. Whittier was a household name. School-boys could quote his poetry. He was declared in the lyrics. From 1847 till 1850, the National Era, a Washington anti-slavery organ, published the major part of Whittier's verses. With the establishment of the Atlantic Monthly in 1857, the first appearance of Whittier's new poetry were made in New England. "Snow Bound" was printed in the sixties, and achieved immediate popularity. It was frequently compared to Burns' "The Collier's Saturday Night."

After the war, Whittier lived at Oak Knoll, Danvers, and at Amesbury. It was an extremely quiet existence. Occasionally the friends of his later young manhood came to see him; there were also many pilgrimages of admirers, but he kept in touch with the world mostly through his poems and his correspondence. His most frequent correspondents were women. Some letters to Lucy Larcom, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Sarah Crane Jewett, Mrs. Fields, Alice and Phoebe Cary, Colla Thaxter and others are among the charms of American literary correspondence.

In his later life there were several events of importance which served to show his veneration in which New England held her poet. As he grew older the schools came to observe his birthday and the Whittier societies held special exercises. On his 70th birthday, men and women of letters contributed to the press notable appreciations of his work. And 10 years later the Governor and many other prominent citizens went to Danvers and formally congratulated him.

Whittier continued to write to the time of his death. One of his last poems was typical of his association of sentiment with things New England. It was called "The Captain's Well," and began in this manner:

From path and perch, by land and main,
The shipwrecked crew came back again,
And like one from the dead, the threshold crossed
Of his wandering home, that had mourned him lost.
Where he sat once more with his kit and kin,
And welcomed his neighbors thronging in,
But when morning came he called for his spade,
"I must pay my debt to the Lord," he said.

Therein was epitomized some of the influences which had ruled Whittier throughout his whole life. The germ of these influences had been sown in his childhood on an obscure New England farm—simple religious faith. Possessed of both faith and sincerity he kept close to elemental features of his early life. Perhaps that was why he became New England's own poet—why also New England reproached his love.