

THE WHITTIER NEWSLETTER

Number 35

Spring 2004

The Whittier Newsletter, jointly edited by Gregory Laing, Jennifer Lyons, Stephanie McDonough, Shirley Osgood-Bailey, John B. Pickard, and Scott and Betty Pike, is published annually by the Trustees of the Whittier Birthplace and the Whittier Clubs of both Amesbury and Haverhill. Items concerning Whittier and Whittier manuscripts, news of Whittier Collections and organizations, queries about future material inclusion in the Newsletter should be sent to Shirley Osgood-Bailey, 10 Hale Spring Road, Plaistow, NH 03865-2311.



Northern View of Whittier Birthplace

Photo by Jeanne Nevard 1996

WHITTIER BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR 2003

Two short articles dealing with famous Whittier poems, an examination of Whittier's literary treatment of Nantucket, and finally a long, intensive analysis of Whittier's political poem, "The Panorama," comprise the Whittier Bibliography for this year. Characteristically only one of the articles is recent, the other three having been published in the 1990s.

The most recent article, Ralph Stewart's "'Barbara Frietchie' and the Civil War" appeared in American Notes and Queries (Vol. 16, No.2, 2003, 32-36). In the article Stewart demonstrates that the poem, which is so often dismissed as melodramatic and unhistorical, actually works well on three distinct levels: "as an account of individual heroism, as a description of the contemporary American political situation, and as a wider statement about human possibilities." Stewart acknowledges that the supposed facts about an old lady waving the Union flag in defiance of Stonewall Jackson are fictional, but he points out the poem does give an accurate impression of Barbara Frietchie's character and that Jackson (who blushes with shame in the poem) did have a forbearance toward civilian defiance. Both figures are, of course, simplified romantic figures and their actions in the poem accurately suggest the existing political climate. By the time the poem was written, Stonewall Jackson had been killed, Grant had taken Vicksburg and Lee himself had suffered a terrible defeat at Gettysburg. And so the poem clearly implies that the North is emerging as the victor in the war. Finally, Stewart argues that on its deepest level the

poem suggests that pre-war America was a sort of Eden threatened by the sinful southern rebels. So the poem asserts that God's natural order, a world filled with "peace, order, beauty, light and law," is being reestablished and this is well symbolized by the Union flag that Fritchie waves and that Jackson allows to stand. Steward concludes that the poem is still worth reading both as history and literature.

The other short article, Gregory E. Jordan's "Wind and Fire: St. Catherine of Siena and the North Wind in John Greenleaf Whittier's Snow-Bound" also appeared in American Notes and Queries (Vol. 8, No. 1, 1995, 18-19). Jordan brings a new interpretation to Whittier's comparison of the religious intensity and the fiery temperament of Harriet Livermore with "the raptures of Siena's Saint." Most previous commentators have noted that St. Catherine's visions, trances and mystical bent all parallel and ironically contrast with the wrongheaded fanaticism of Harriet Livermore, but Jordan offers a new twist. St. Catherine, he points out, is the patroness of fire prevention and thus unlikely becomes an ally of Livermore, whose coldness and inhumanity threatens to extinguish "the hearth of love and the Holy Spirit that animates the Whittier family." Finally, Jordan notes that the north wind, which also threatens the family fire, was associated in St. Catherine's time with the night, aging and death, concealing heaven and the hope of salvation.

By contrast with these two previous articles, Nathaniel Philbrick's "Every Wave is a Fortune: Nantucket Island and Making of an American Icon" (The New England Quarterly, Vol. 66, No. 3, 1993, 434-447) is a thorough historical examination of how the Nantucket sailor became an image of rugged American individualism and the power of an independent and free nation. Philbrick traces out the development of this image from pre-revolutionary days through the speeches of Edmund Burke, the comments of Ben Franklin up to Crevecoeur's famous "Letters from An American Farmer," five of which describe the Nantucketer as having the special character of enterprise and independence that is so typically American.

The center of the article examines how writers like Cooper, Whittier, Emerson and Melville utilized this "icon" of the Nantucketee as a central tenet in some of their writings. For Whittier Philbrick examines the ballad, "The Exiles," an account of a New England Quaker, Thomas Macy, who flees to Nantucket to escape persecution. Whittier praises the island as an enclave of righteousness, as an idealized, almost sacred vision of what America should be. Whittier calls the island "a refuge of the free" and ends his poem with this stanza:

*God bless the sea-beat island!
And grant forevermore,
That charity and freedom dwell
As now upon her shore!*

The last half of the article examines the positive responses of writers like Cooper and Emerson, but as Philbrick points out, by the 1850s Nantucket and its image had suffered a significant "sea change." Their rugged individualism and utopian island image suffered as the island underwent a major economic downturn. Melville himself in his Moby Dick chapters on Nantucket and especially in his portraits of its hard-bitten, grimly realistic Quaker whaling men and ship owners portrayed the island as an economic and spiritually depressed place. Ultimately, though, Philbrick observes that the "immense appeal of Nantucket's role as a cultural phenomenon" has remained secure even into our present day and its mythic status has been well served by both the literary and historic traditions that have described the island.

The final article for this bibliography, David Gant's "The Unequal Sovereigns of a Slaveholding Land: The North as Subject in Whittier's 'The Panorama,'" appeared in Criticism (Vol. 37, No.4, 1996, 521-549). This difficult, closely reasoned argument is characteristic of a new approach to Whittier studies, one which places Whittier anti-slavery



*The original portrait of Whittier at age 25
by Deacon Robert Peckham.
This painting was loaned by the Birthplace
to the Smithsonian Institute, Washington, DC
for display at the American Museum of Art
in a showing of "Portraits of Distinguished
Americans" in June 1996*

comes from Whittier relative and expert, John B. Pickard: It stands as one of the most important articles written about Whittier's political writings and his place in the shaping of the Republican Party, which we have seen in the past decade.

HAVERTHILL WHITTIER CLUB

The 118th summer meeting of the club was held at the Birthplace on June 8, 2003. Dr. Donald H. Pfister, a professor of Biology at Harvard University presented "Reflections on the Botanist Roland Thaxter, the son of Celia Thaxter." Celia was a longtime resident of the Isles of Shoals and Whittier friend.

For only the second time in the history of the club a snowstorm forced the cancellation of the December 2003 meeting at the Birthplace. The meeting, which was transferred to March 2004, celebrated the tenure of Scott and Betty Pike as curators of the Birthplace. A video featuring the Pikes had been featured on the local cable TV station. It was prepared and presented by Larry Seaman and Barney Gallagher. Bill Woodhouse and Gordon Hamilton, neighbors of the Birthplace handcrafted a box for the Pikes. They used wood from an heirloom apple tree which had fallen during the past winter. The Pikes were also given a cake which expressed the best wishes of the club.

and political writings in the historical context of the pre-Civil War era to demonstrate their effectiveness and centrality in the national debate about slavery, states' rights and individual freedom. Gant believes that "The Panorama" is Whittier's most important political poem and one of his lasting achievements. Indeed he argues that the true import of the work is its "ability to coordinate" and at the same time to "confound" the contemporary political dispute about the fate of the new territories: whether they would enter the Union as free or slave states. Whittier's poem, Grant insists, presents the two main, the two somewhat contradictory elements of the Republican Party ideology in the 1850s, that of its attachment to a society based on free labor and that of its fear of the Slave Power as a political threat.

As Gant points out, this long rambling poem has a definite two-part structure. In the first part, the showman-narrator is displaying to the public his panoramic view of two possible futures for the new states of the west as alternately free or slave. The second part is the showman's lecture to his northern audience about avoiding a slave-controlled country. A fitting accolade for this Gant essay

For the June 20th meeting the club plans to have Ben Pickard give a talk on “Whittier Relatives” with focus on his father’s rather turbulent relations with his famed uncle.

The new Board of Control is: President, Elinor Curtin-Cameron; Vice-President, Richard Seaman; Treasurer, John McCutcheon; Secretary, Alberta Andrewartha, Board members- Barbara Bachner, Shirley Osgood-Bailey, Mariana Morse, Elizabeth Patterson, and Betty Pike. The new curator, Reneé Harlow, will serve ex-officio.

The following short biography will acquaint Newsletter readers with the new president of the Haverhill Whittier Club.

Elinor Curtin-Cameron, a lifelong resident of Haverhill, taught English at Haverhill High School for 33 years. She began her professional career by working at the Haverhill Public Library. She also taught as an adjunct instructor at Northern Essex Community College and at Raytheon through Fitchburg State. Her interest in Whittier was first sparked by her father, also a Haverhill native, who frequently quoted Whittier. Along with Barney Gallagher and Gerri Minihan, she crafted the script for “Snowbound Weekend.”

THE WHITTIER BIRTHPLACE

It is with great regret that the Newsletter has to announce that Betty and Scott Pike will be leaving their posts as resident curators at the Birthplace to begin a full retirement in an apartment in Amesbury. Their six years as curators proved to be significant ones in the Birthplace’s long history. No couple within recent memory brought such intelligence and enthusiasm or such engaging personalities to their tasks as did Betty and Scott, and certainly no curators ever had better Whittier backgrounds than they did, for from 1993-1998 they served as curators at the Amesbury Whittier home.

Throughout their years at the Birthplace they made the tours of the house and grounds vivid dramatic occurrences for all visitors and in truth made everyone who entered the birthplace feel like a welcomed guest in their “Whittier” home. Scott envisioned, created and then wrote a brochure for the Freeman Memorial Trail, a walking trail of thirteen stations, which weaves its way from the house to the cemetery and back to the shed. They seemed to turn their whole lives over to the learning and furthering of Whittier knowledge. We all will sorely miss their presence.



*Betty and Scott Pike, retiring curators of Whittier Birthplace.
(photo by Ken Yuszkus)*

Here follows, what is to be their last report on yearly activities at the Birthplace:

The past year has seen an increase in the number of scheduled groups to tour the house and grounds. An association of fifteen home-schooled children and their parents/teachers, three groups of summer school students from Whittier Vocational Technical High School, a large continuing education class from the University of Massachusetts-Lowell, a reunion of World War II shipmates and their wives, four Cub Scout dens - at different times - were just a few of the many and varied groups. Perhaps most pleasant was a church group from Lowell. The minister who accompanied her flock had selected hymns by Mr. Whittier for the service that Sunday and lines from his poetry for her readings.

The Essex National Heritage Commission again held their "Trails and Sails Weekend" and we had a somewhat better turnout this year in spite of gray and threatening weather.

Sadly, two of the very old fruit trees were destroyed by windstorms in the fall, but the bitter winter has done no further harm - a miracle when you consider the age of this great old house and environs.

We will say farewell, but not good-bye. We are moving only a short distance away and plan to remain active in the Whittier Club.

WHITTIER BIRTHPLACE TRUSTEES

A Letter from of the Board of Trustees President, Dr. Raymond F. Comeau:

The past year has been active and fruitful from the point of view of the Trustees of the Whittier Homestead. First, we have welcomed two new trustees, Marcia Rogers from Spring Hill Farm, and attorney Jay Cleary, a long-time supporter of the Birthplace and Whittier Club member. Already these two trustees have played important roles on various committees, and we know the Birthplace will continue to be cared for through their participation.

Second, for the first time in its history, the Board has begun a fund-raising campaign, with a goal of \$100,000. We felt we had to find a way to secure additional funds because the return on our investments has not kept pace with our costs, and we realized that even simple preservation activities, such as putting a new roof on the shed and painting the barn and house, could not be accomplished without additional funds. We must continue to preserve this jewel in the history of Haverhill. The Trustees themselves kicked off the campaign by contributing about \$7,000. The Board of Control of the Whittier Club has also contributed \$5,000, and many individual members of the Whittier Club have made small and large donations. To date, we have collected about \$15,000.

I want to encourage all members of the Whittier Club to contribute whatever they can to this important cause. The Trustees know we can count on your support and generosity. Please make your contributions payable to Trustees, Whittier Homestead, and send them to the Whittier Birthplace, 305 Whittier Road, Haverhill, MA 01830-1738. We must all chip in for this effort, so please give this as much consideration as possible.



The Barn at Whittier's Birthplace is in need of extensive repairs.

Third, we heard in January that Scott and Betty Pike have decided to step down as curators, a position they have held for six years. Although we understand their decision, we were sad to hear this news because they have been such exemplary curators. The good news is that they are moving to Amesbury, right next door, and they plan to stay active in the Whittier Club. We have not lost them; they have just moved over a little!

We had 15 candidates for the curator position that we advertised in various places. After a careful search and interview process under the direction of President Raymond Comeau and Trustee Elinor Curtin-Cameron and Vice-President Tim Coco, the Board voted unanimously to offer the position to Reneé Harlow from Newburyport. Ms. Harlow moved in on the last weekend in March and is already welcoming guests. We invite you to drop by to welcome her if you can. I am sure she will be pleased to meet you.

Other Birthplace Trustees include Decius Veasey, Treasurer; Richard J. Sheehan, Jr., Secretary; George L. Winfield, Jr., Shirley Osgood-Bailey, and Kingsbury Davis and John B. Pickard, who are both honorary members.

THE HAVERHILL PUBLIC LIBRARY

A Florida researcher and Whittier relative, Marilyn R. Hesse, is in the process of updating and reworking the 1937 Whittier Family genealogy. She wrote in October, 2003, that the work has been “a formidable undertaking, begun in 2000, and in addition to working forwards, we’ve also spent considerable research time in working backwards on many of the early New England settlers who married into the family. I’m very excited about our progress and hope to consider it ‘finished’ within a few months.” All Whittier students and *Newsletter* readers will certainly want to see a copy when the work is finally published.

THE ELIZABETH H. WHITTIER CLUB

The club’s usual activities have been severely curtailed this year due to the illness of Elizabeth Dostie, the club President. [Elizabeth is now doing well.] Officers for this year are: Dianne Cole, Vice-President; Donna Simpson, Treasurer; Elma Naumetz, Assistant Treasurer; Geraldine Wallace, Recording Secretary; Cynthia Costello, Corresponding Secretary; and Lorraine Reid, Auditor. The directors for the club are Marie Marland, Anna Robinson, Ann Breton, Ernestine Goodwin, Betty Shepler, Alice Toomey, and Jean Darisse. Because of bad weather both the December and the January meetings had to be cancelled. The club plans, though, to continue to meet on the first Monday of each month at the St. Joseph’s Parish Hall.

During the past year, the club gave a \$1,000 scholarship to an outstanding Amesbury High graduate and sponsored a table at the Amesbury block party in June.

THE AMESBURY WHITTIER HOME

Stephanie McDonough reports that a recent visitor to the area, a lady from New York, indicated that a publishing house was thinking of doing a book on Whittier’s poems. We hope the report is true, but we do have a fine recent book that collects the best of Whittier’s poems with insightful critical comments, William Jollif’s [The Poetry of John Greenleaf Whittier](#) published by the Friends United Press in 2000 and currently on sale at the Birthplace. “This volume not only makes Whittier accessible to both the general reader and the literary scholar, but also offers sound critical and often intriguing reasons

why he should be read" (J. B. Pickard). It's hard to imagine a better sampling of Whittier's best poems than this collection, but the world would certainly benefit from another edition.

As a postscript: The "woman from New York" is Brenda Wineapple, a Haverhill native and author of a recent biography of Nathaniel Hawthorne as well as biographies of Genet and of Gertrude Stein and her brother. Her book, John Greenleaf Whittier: Selected Poems, published by Library of America, was reviewed in the April 19, 2004 edition of *The Boston Globe*. Michael Kenney, commenting on Wineapple's book notes that, "There is a freshness and honesty to be found in a revisited Whittier."

Stephanie also reports that the historic Harriet Prescott Spofford House on Deer Island has been put up for sale.

The Whittier Home Association sponsored a Whittier Home Garden party on June 5, 2003, which featured a talk by Tordis Isselhardt, a publisher and historical interpreter on her experiences as director of a historical house museum in Vermont.

WHITTIER MISCELLANY

"In School Days" Poem Remembered by Local Students *by Barney Gallagher*

Haverhill's outstanding literary figure, poet John Greenleaf Whittier, was born and educated in the East Parish part of the city, along what is now known as Amesbury Road.

All the children of his neighborhood went to a little one-room school. His memories of one of his schoolmates produced a poem "In School-Days" about childhood romance that Oliver Wendell Holmes called the "most beautiful schoolboy poem in the English language."

In a spelling bee, Whittier was out-spelled by a girl who lived only a few houses from his. As Whittier recalled it 60 years later, the girl approached him after school. As they stood there, the girl glanced down as she told Whittier she was sorry that she spelled the winning word, "Because, you see, I love you."

This made it an ideal setting for a Valentine's Day story, and for the past few years, children from Haverhill schools have recited the poem on Valentine's Day. They have done that at the grave of Lydia Ayer in Walnut Cemetery, near her home and that of Whittier.

Lydia Ayer died at the age of 14. Whittier's fans have marked her grave with a stone that shows a picture of that little school.

The poem recited at the grave by children, some from schools named for Whittier, reached the hearts of those who attended the programs at the cemetery.

Larry Dudley, an active volunteer at Haverhill Community Television, and a fellow HCTV member and Kiwanian, John Stevens, have filmed the program at the grave of Lydia Ayer, helping to preserve the memory of an original childhood romance in Haverhill.

One of the programs was shown during the Valentine's Day period. There are several other Whittier programs regularly shown on HCTV.

WHITTIER WEBSITE

For those who are computer friendly, Whittier Homestead trustee Timothy Coco's company, COCO+CO.'s Custom Content, has recently established a website rich in information about the Whittier Birthplace and is accessible at:

www.johngreenleafwhittier.com

REQUEST FOR VOLUNTEERS

The birthplace is in need of volunteers to help with tours. Training will be provided. We are also looking for someone with knowledge of fruit trees as the old orchard is in great need of pruning. Please call René at the birthplace, 978-373-3979.

~ *TRIBUTE* ~

Isabelle M. Freeman (1907-2003)

A long-time staunch supporter of John Greenleaf Whittier, Isabelle M. (Brown) Freeman died on December 16, 2003, at the age of 96. Seventy-three years of marriage to her late centenarian husband Donald C., kept her constantly in the forefront. The two had met while she was a student and he her instructor in his first teaching role. They never parted company until two years ago.

Over the years, Mrs. Freeman was active with the First Church of Christ, served as past president of the Hale Hospital Auxiliary and Haverhill Women's City Club, and was vice-president of the Whittier Trustees, headed by Mr. Freeman for many years. She was a member of the Haverhill Whittier Club for over 60 years, serving 3 years as treasurer and 15 years as a Board of Control Member.

Born in Brooks, Maine, Mrs. Freeman attended the University of Maine before moving to Haverhill in 1928. She worked as secretary at the Fox, Greenleaf, and Hunking schools, as well as Haverhill High and the school superintendent's office.

She leaves two sons, Donald C. Freeman, Jr., Burlington, Massachusetts, and Harris B. Freeman, Moab, Utah, five grandchildren and several nieces and nephews.