

# THE WHITTIER NEWSLETTER

Number 38

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The Trustees of the Whittier Birthplace, the Haverhill Whittier Club, and the Amesbury Whittier Home Association annually publish the Whittier Newsletter, jointly edited by Elinor Curtin Cameron and Arthur Veasey. Items concerning Whittier and Whittier manuscripts, news of Whittier collections and organizations, and queries about future material inclusions in the Newsletter should be addressed to Arthur Veasey at svz@comcast.net.

## Welcome from the President

I am pleased to welcome readers to this 2010 edition of the John Greenleaf Whittier Newsletter on behalf of the Trustees of the Whittier Birthplace. To us and his other admirers, John Greenleaf Whittier, whose two hundredth anniversary we celebrated just three years ago, remains a wellspring of inspiration. Many would agree that



today more than ever the world could use his clear vision and strong voice as it tries to deal with issues such as family values, human rights, peace, and sustainability.

The nine members of the Board of Trustees have continued to play an active part in perpetuating the legacy of Whittier in Haverhill and well beyond by overseeing his 17-acre homestead, with its home, barn, and shed, and lending its support to activities that sustain his memory. This year, for example, the home's windows and chimney have been restored, and a new coating of paint applied. On the operational side, the Birthplace continues to be well served by its curator, Gus Reusch, especially by his continuing effort to encourage Haverhill schoolchildren and other visitors to tour the premises.

I hope all of you Whittier enthusiasts will enjoy reading the selections in this 2010 newsletter and will continue to support the Birthplace through donations and participation. We are all convinced, I know, that the memory of John Greenleaf Whittier is well worth preserving.

Raymond F. Comeau, Ph.D.  
President, Board of Trustees

## Country Brook, Fernside Brook and Whittier's Haunted Bridge

The year 1817 marked the beginning of the "era of good feelings" when America was passively united and John Greenleaf Whittier was a carefree farm boy. Back then the Country Bridge crossed the East Meadow River also known as Country Brook just a short distance from the Whittier homestead, where it winds it's way to

the Merrimack River, emptying halfway between the Rocks Village Bridge and the Chain Ferry (now the site of the Groveland Bridge). Intrepid hikers can still find the ruins of the bridge today, just off Middle Road and before the Children of Israel Cemetery.

The deep dark water under its span was rumored to hold the bodies of victims from the Indian massacres and was thought to be haunted. Reports of headless ghosts and hobgoblins spread throughout the area. Whittier immortalized these stories in



*Whittier's Haunted Bridge, East Parish, August 1890*

"The Country Bridge Ghost." and other poems. In his later years, Whittier recalled for his visitor and historian, Rebecca Ingersoll Davis, a story from his youth. A woman seeking refuge had startled The Whittier family one evening, after being frightened by what she described as a headless ghost near Country Bridge. The chilling tale was so compelling to Whittier and several of his boyhood chums that they dared one another to run across the bridge after dark while calling out the headless ghost. Whittier recalled that he approached the bridge "whistling to keep his courage up, but a panic seized him and he turned and ran home without daring to look behind."

In his reminiscence titled "The Country Bridge" Whittier eloquently penned the following: "It was, for the most part, a sober, quiet little river; but at intervals it broke into a low, rippling laugh over rocks and trunks of fallen trees. There had, so tradition said, once been a witch meeting on its banks of six little old women in short, sky-blue cloaks; and if a drunken teamster could be credited, a ghost was once seen bobbing for eels under Country Bridge. It ground our corn and rye for us, at its two gristmills; and we drove our sheep to it for their spring washing, an anniversary which was looked forward to with intense delight, for it was always rare fun for the youngsters. This brook in its turn, after doing duty at two or three saw and grist mills, the clack of which we could hear in still days across the intervening woodlands, found its way to the great river, and the river took it up and bore it down to the great sea."

He refers to the haunting again in "The Home-Coming of the Bride"

They passed the dam and the gray gristmill,  
Whose walls with the jar of grinding shook,  
And crossed for the moment awed and still,  
The haunted bridge of the Country Brook.

Country Brook was a source of power for the mill sites near Millvale long before the mighty Merrimack could be harnessed. Even the smaller Fernside Brook, a tributary that runs through the Whittier property before emptying into Country Brook, was reason enough for Thomas Whittier to build a homestead there. A dam built by John Greenleaf Whittier's ancestors provided water to the household and enough energy to power a small gristmill. Evidence of Thomas Whittier's dam and ancient mill can still be found in the woods close by to the homestead.

## **Whittier, Alaska**

While on a vacation tour of Alaska with my family last June the bus transporting us from Seward to Anchorage drove past the town of Whittier. The 12 square mile city and nearby Whittier Glacier are located approximately 75 miles southeast of Anchorage. Whittier is situated on the west side of Prince William Sound and is surrounded by the massive Chugach National Forest. This area, including Prince William Sound is well known for its pristine waters, deep fjords and massive glaciers. When I inquired about the origin of the name I was told that it was named after the nearby Whittier Glacier. Undeterred I asked how the glacier came to be so-called. After a bewildering moment of discussion including the "chicken or the egg theory," one of our fellow travelers observed that several of the glaciers bore the names of a university or college such as the nearby Johns Hopkins Glacier. Could Whittier Glacier be named after the college of the same name in Whittier California? After all, the connection there was undeniable.

A quick Wikipedia reference check reveals that College Fjord is located in the northern section of Prince William Sound. The fjord contains five tidewater glaciers (glaciers that terminate in water), five large valley glaciers, and dozens of smaller glaciers, most named after renowned east coast colleges (women's colleges for the NW side, and men's colleges for the SE side). College Fjord was discovered in 1899 during the Harriman expedition, when the glaciers were named. The expedition included a Harvard and an Amherst professor, and they named many of the glaciers after elite colleges. According to Bruce Molina, author of *Alaska's Glaciers*, "they took great delight in ignoring Princeton."

Could such a connection exist to the small west coast institution that bears our Quaker poets surname? Perhaps one of our readers has the answer. (Ed.)

## **And this from the Whittier Neighborhood Association in Denver, Colorado**

Denver's historic Whittier neighborhood is named for the school located at Downing Street and 24th Avenue. The school's name honored the nineteenth-century abolitionist poet, John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892). Whittier was a founding

member of the Republican Party. His poems attacked the injustices of slavery, while at the same time condemning the inherent hypocrisy of a nation that was founded on the ideal of freedom. A religious man of Quaker faith, he was deeply concerned about social justice. After the Civil War, Whittier remained a moral voice for the country in its struggle to overcome racism.

The legacy of John Greenleaf Whittier has lived on in the Whittier neighborhood. Given the fact that the neighborhood has been racially integrated since the 1890's, the Whittier name signifies the role the neighborhood has played in the history of segregation and integration in Denver.

The developers of Whittier were among Denver's earliest citizens. These pioneers played vigorous roles as leaders in agriculture, mining, railroading, education, manufacturing, retailing, and government during the formation of the city. A. B. Case, one of the first settlers in Denver in 1859, was a founder of the University of Denver and a prominent figure in the movement to reform city government. The Case Addition, filed in 1868, was the first subdivision platted in Whittier and is located in the northeasternmost quadrant of the neighborhood.

The neighborhood was home to many of Denver's finest craftsmen, who contributed to the architectural details of some of the community's most significant structures. Their skills are evidenced in ornate details found on many of the homes. Most of the larger and more ornate residences are located on corner lots, which display their impressive details to the best advantage.

The historic significance of Whittier was noted in 1974 and again in 1983 in surveys conducted by the Colorado Historical Society. The Denver Landmark Preservation Commission, in a report issued in 1995, recognized the potential for designation of High and Williams streets within Whittier as a historic district.

## **GREGORY H. LAING: A Remembrance**

Greg Laing served as the curator of the Special Collections at the Haverhill Public Library for over thirty years and was a tremendous resource to the community. His encyclopedic mind contained a vast reservoir of knowledge including much of the history surrounding John Greenleaf Whittier and the Birthplace. Greg developed a love for history from his family and spent hours as a boy at the old library on Summer Street. His awareness of local landmarks and historic homes and families was remarkable. Greg was a member of the Haverhill, West Newbury and Portsmouth, NH historical societies and the Historical Society of Old Newbury where he served as a board member and past president. His passing in February 2008 was a loss not only for the preservation and observance of local history but also in the passion for knowledge and appreciation for curiosity that he shared with so many.

## **Whittier Home Association Considers IMLS Grant Programs**

In late 2008, the John Greenleaf Whittier Home Association received a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services for the development of school programs and program evaluation. This prestigious federal grant was one of only one

hundred fifty-four awarded nationally.

This year the Home Association invited two groups of potential visitors to comment on and suggest ways to improve programming at the site. Suggestions ranged from moving the time of meetings so that working people could participate to involving families through a series of programs aimed specifically at young children. Museum educator Cara Iacobucci, an adjunct professor with the Tufts University museum studies program, developed a series of school programs for children in grades 2 through 5. Barbara Silberman, a seasoned museum professional, facilitated the focus groups and directed the project. The results will be presented at an all-member retreat scheduled for January 9, 2010. All members are urged to attend to learn the results of this important project and to discuss the future of the Home Association.

## Whittier Monument at the Chain Bridge

With modest fanfare the bronze and granite monument that quietly guarded the northbound side of the John Greenleaf Whittier Bridge on Interstate 95 was lifted on to a state highway department truck in 2005 and removed to the Chain Bridge Visitors Center. Travelers who were previously at their own peril in viewing the bronze plaque and inscription can stop by the visitor's center at the fork of the road between Main and Merrill Streets in Amesbury to admire the memorial. The monument was originally dedicated in 1954 by Governor Christian A. Herter and then State Public Works Commissioner John A. Volpe. The inscription bears the following stanza from Whittier's 1866 poem "Our Master:"

Our Lord and Master of us all  
What e'er our name or sign  
We own Thy sway, we hear Thy call  
We test our lives by Thine



## A little smile, a word of cheer ...

Shirley Osgood Bailey served as editor of the "Whittier Newsletter" from 1997 to 2007. Rarely has a local landmark received such devotion to the memory and preservation of its historic culture than during Shirley's cheerful tenure. An earlier interruption stretching back to 1988 meant no Whittier News was published to promote the activities celebrated in Amesbury and Haverhill for their favorite son for almost nine years. From the moment Shirley assumed responsibility, this Newsletter became a constant treasure trove of history, an advocate of the JGW legacy and a town crier of events, writings and programs that preserved the Whittier memory. Shirley has stepped aside from her active role of editor and keeper of the Whittier clarion but she remains a guiding light to her fellow board members and a spiritual compass for those who follow in her footsteps.

**The Trustees of the John Greenleaf Whittier Birthplace** enthusiastically welcome the addition of Glen Hamilton to its Board. Glenn was born and raised in the shadow of Job's Hill on Whittier Road and worked there as a young farmhand. Even more impressive, in 1984 Glenn and his bride were the first couple to be wedded at the Birthplace. Glenn clearly brings a life long devotion to the Birthplace and its historic legacy.



### **Fine Arts Scholars in Residence at the Birthplace**

With the departure of Curator Renee Harlow the Trustees of the Whittier Birthplace were on the lookout for a new tenant to provide not only live-in security but also an abiding respect for the history and antiquity of Haverhill's foremost landmark. We are therefore, excited to introduce Jill Hari and Sharon Norquest as our ideal residents.

Jill held the 2008-2009 Andrew W. Mellon Conservation Fellowship at Historic New England (SPNEA) in Haverhill and is currently the Samuel H. Kres Conservation Fellow in the objects lab at the Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies at The Harvard Art Museum. Jill holds a B.A. in Art from the University of Oregon and an M.A. in Conservation studies from the University of Sussex at West Dean College in England.

We doubled our good fortune when Sharon Norquest joined Jill as a co-tenant last spring. Sharon is the current Andrew W. Mellon Conservation Fellow at Historic New England and a recent graduate of the Winterthur University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation where she earned her Masters Degree. Sharon previously earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in ceramics from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Please give a hearty welcome to these two accomplished young women.

## **Scott Pike 1923 – 2009**

Scott Todd Pike, beloved curator of the JGW Birthplace in Haverhill and site manager of the Amesbury Home passed away on August 20, 2009 after a long illness. Scott brought a gentleness of spirit and a truly scholarly approach to all he did. His lasting legacy at the Birthplace is the Donald Freeman Trail, which he laid out around the property, linking well known Whittier verses with familiar sites on the grounds.

Scott was born in Bridgeton, ME on June 18, 1923. He grew up in Rowley, MA and graduated from Newburyport High School and did post graduate work at Governor Dummer Academy in Byfield.

During WWII Scott served in the U.S.Navy where he earned the rank of Lieutenant. (j.g.) He received his A.B. from Middlebury College, studied art in France and earned his M.A. in American Studies from the University of Minnesota. He taught for five years before becoming a textbook salesman for Houghton-Mifflin. After his retirement he served with his wife Betty as site manager at the Amesbury Home for five years and curator at the Birthplace for seven years.

He is survived by his wife and by three daughters, Amanda Pike, Meg Pike Costello and Ruth Pike Allen.

### **WHITTIER WEBSITE**

[www.johngreenleafwhittier.com](http://www.johngreenleafwhittier.com)

## **Snowbound Weekend**

January 16 - 17, 2010

10:00 am to 3:00 pm

*at the*

**John Greenleaf Whittier Birthplace**

305 Whittier Road

Haverhill, MA



The Haverhill Whittier Club  
Haverhill Public Library  
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Haverhill, MA 01830

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