

THE WHITTIER NEWSLETTER

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The Whittier Newsletter, jointly edited by Betty Goodwin, Gregory Laing, Jennifer Lyons, Stephanie McDonough, Shirley Osgood-Bailey, John B. Pickard, and Scott Pike, is published annually by the Trustees of the Whittier Birthplace and the Whittier Clubs of both Haverhill and Amesbury. Items concerning Whittier and Whittier manuscripts, news of Whittier Collections and organizations, queries about future material inclusion in the Newsletter should be sent to John B. Pickard, 406 NE 7th Avenue, Gainesville, Florida 32601.



WHITTIER HOMESTEAD

Photo by Dave Hoyt, Merrimac, MA

WHITTIER BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR 2002

Three articles focusing on nineteenth century authors contain significant comments on Whittier's reform work and prose writings. Two are recent publications, while the third was published in 1994.

Carla Peterson's "Francis Harper, Charlotte Forten, and African-American Literary Reconstruction" appeared in Joyce Warren and Margaret Dickie's Challenging Boundaries: Gender and Periodization (Georgia Press: Athens, GA, 2000, 39-671). This long essay compares and contrasts the writings of two black women writers who published their main works during the Reconstruction Period. Though both women, because of their sex and race, faced similar publishing problems, they worked quite differently. Harper wrote within and for the black community and asked her readers to rethink their aspirations toward becoming a part of the standard white culture. Instead of accepting the traditional white values, Harper argued that blacks needed to preserve their own family structure and domestic values as a basis for inclusion in American society. In contrast Forten who had been a special protégé of John Greenleaf Whittier attempted to write for both a black and white audience, a readership that transcended racial borders. With Whittier's intermediation she got her essay, "Life on the Sea Islands," published in the prestigious Atlantic Monthly for its May and June issues in 1864. When Whittier later tried, however, to obtain a self-supporting job for Forten with the Atlantic Monthly, he was unsuccessful. Characteristically her best writing of this period, "A Visit to the

Birthplace of John Greenleaf Whittier," (which appeared in Scribners Monthly in September, 1872), was published only with the intercession of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, another white patron. Ms. Peterson comments that this piece fully expresses Forten's ideal of American culture. "Written within the tradition of the 'country life' writings of British authors ... Forten explores cultivated country life within a paradigm of liberal humanism familiar both to her and her readers. In her sketch she travels to the places of Whittier's childhood—the town of Haverhill, the Seminary, Kenoza Lake, the old schoolhouse and homestead. The pleasures afforded by the visit depend entirely on her familiarity with Whittier's poetry and her ability to associate places seen with poems read; likewise the impact of Forten's piece on her readers rests on her assumption of shared literary associations, indeed of a shared national culture." Such was not to be, however. Throughout the Reconstruction Period, Forten found difficulty in placing her work in major white journals and was forced to publish in two minor Boston journals. Increasingly her writing echoed her frustration with the dominant white culture that she had once tried to enter, and she too turned to publishing in African-American journals.

Ann-Marie Weiss wrote "The Murderous Mother and the Solicitous Father: Violence, Jacksonian Family Values, and Hannah Duston's Captivity" in American Studies International (Vol. 36, 1998, 46-65). In this article Weiss argues that Hannah Duston, the Massachusetts woman who was abducted by Indians in 1697 and escaped by killing an entire Indian family, was considered a heroine to her contemporaries; Cotton Mather immortalized her in sermon and story. But in the antebellum period, writers like John Greenleaf Whittier and Nathaniel Hawthorne, in retelling the story, portrayed Hannah Duston as a violent, murderous female who killed a whole family of men, women, and children and scalped them in hope of bounty. Weiss notes that in Whittier's account, "The Mother's Revenge," Duston represents a kind of aggressive, almost heroic demon/angel figure, as a frightening reminder from the dim past, one now thankfully vanquished by the forces of progress. Whittier condemns her dangerous individualism and the dark and terrible passions that motivated her revenge. In some other revisions of the story, notably those of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Sarah Josepha Hale, the true hero becomes her husband, who avoided capture and saved and nurtured seven of the couple's children. In Hawthorne's version, Hannah has become an "awful woman," a "raging tigress," who only wants revenge and blood money, while the husband is described as a "tenderhearted ... valiant man." So, disturbed by signs of female assertiveness and challenges to male authority, antebellum writers like Whittier and Hawthorne chose to demonize Duston and extol her husband as the ideal father. Politically, this fed the attempt, encouraged by Andrew Jackson himself, to portray the president as the solicitous father of his people.

An earlier article, Jeanne Moskal's "John Greenleaf Whittier and Ebenezer Elliott" appeared in Resources for American Literary Study (Vol. 29, No. 1, 1994, 37-44). This article traces out Whittier's interest in Ebenezer Elliott, the British writer whose verses, like Whittier's poems, advocated social reform. His most famous collection of poems, The Corn Law Rhymes (1830) denounced the injustice of the tax on grain, which significantly raised the price of bread throughout England. When Elliott died in 1849, Whittier wrote a poetic tribute, entitled "Elliott," which is reprinted in its entirety along with some commentary on its content and style. In addition the article reprints a previously unpublished letter, offering a number of biographical suggestions about its recipient and Whittier's own concern about having a biography written about his life.

Haverhill Whittier Club

The summer meeting was held on June 9, 2002, at the Birthplace with over forty people in attendance. After a short business meeting, Betty Pike read a Whittier poem and then Debra Lee Crosby presented a program on Lydia Pinkham. Attired in a long black nine-

teenth century costume, Ms. Crosby dramatically recreated key events in the life of Lydia Pinkham who went on to achieve fame marketing her vegetable compound throughout the United States. Born in Lynn, Lydia became a charter member of the Anti-Slavery Society there; and in all probability was present when Whittier visited the Society during the 1830s and 1840s. After her marriage in 1842, she had four children and became known for her home remedies. Her husband Isaac was not successful in various business practices and in 1873 went bankrupt and became mentally ill. To stave off the family creditors, Lydia began selling her vegetable compound and, with her picture on the label, it became an instant success. It earned her family a substantial fortune and remained a standard medicine for the common ailments associated with women for over fifty years. Her fame even garnered a ballad satire whose refrain and some verses went:

*OH-H-H we'll sing of Lydia Pinkham,
And her love for the human race
How she sells her vegetable compound
And the papers, the papers they publish
They publish her FACE!*

*Lizzie Smith had tired feelings,
Terrible pains reduced her weight
She began to take the compound;
Now she weighs three hundred and eight.*



*Seated- Left to right: Kara Lafferty as Mary Whittier, Meredith Collins as Aunt Mercy Hussey
Kneeling: Risa Sayers as Matthew Whittier. Abigail Gilmore as Elizabeth Whittier,
and Drew Caruso as J.G. Whittier*

On December 7th and 8th, 2002, 255 people came to the Whittier Birthplace to watch and participate in the fifth and possibly final presentation of the very popular event known as *Snow-Bound Weekend*. Nature cooperated by providing several inches of sparkling new-fallen snow just before the first visitor arrived at the Birthplace—not quite enough for sleigh rides, but great for the cozy horse-drawn hayrides along Whittier Road offered to one and all. Other activities traditional to the event were: watching the sheep and chickens and horses, at the barn; going to the heated shop building to listen to a lady fid-

bler playing popular 19th century tunes and various volunteers (including Haverhill's Mayor Guerin) reading Whittier's poetry; joining in a group carol sing; consuming lots of hot apple cider and donuts; then finally gathering in the ancient kitchen of the Birthplace to observe a reenactment of scenes from Whittier's most famous poem, Snow-Bound, as captured in the script of Elinor Cameron's wonderfully crafted dramatic glimpse into both the hardships and the joys of 19th century New England farm life.

The 117th Winter Meeting of the Whittier Club was held in the Johnson Auditorium at the Haverhill Public Library on December 15, 2002. The main feature was a tour of the Donald C. Freeman Whittier Room given by Gregory H. Laing, curator of Special Collections. The room displays one of the finest collections of manuscripts and first editions of John Greenleaf Whittier's poetry in the nation.

Mariana W. Morse, dedicated President of the Haverhill Whittier Club for the past four years has stepped down, but will remain on the Board of Control. Newly elected or retained officers are: Elinor Cameron, President; Atty. Jay Cleary, Vice President; Alberta Andrewartha, Secretary; and Richard Seaman, Treasurer. Other Board members are: Barbara Bachner, Diane Collins, Mariana W. Morse, John McCutcheon, Shirley Osgood-Bailey, and Honorary Member Dr. Raymond F. Comeau.

THE WHITTIER BIRTHPLACE

Resident curators Betty and Scott Pike have had another busy year as Birthplace curators and wrote the following report about activities in and around the Homestead: "Spring, 2002, saw us once again welcoming school children. We gave tours to eighteen fifth-grade classes from the Haverhill school system and also to two third-grade classes from the Portsmouth Christian Academy. The latter group has an hour's ride each way; so after they've toured, they enjoy the lunches they've brought with them, followed by a noisy and vigorous runaround in the lower field. We always feel that the five generations of Whittiers who lived here would be glad the visiting youngsters have such a wonderful time.

"On Saturday, April 27, the Birthplace participated in what was billed as *400 Years of Poetry in the Merrimack Valley: A Celebration of Anne Bradstreet, John Greenleaf Whittier, Robert Frost, and Jack Kerouac*. The morning was filled with family-oriented events held at the Lawrence Heritage Park. In the afternoon, 100 people boarded luxury buses to travel the valley and tour the sites where the poets were born, lived, worked, and were buried.

"September 15, 2002, was an exciting and historic day at the Birthplace. For the first time, at least as far as anyone knows, a wedding was held in the lower field in front of the old house. The weather had been perfect for the week before the 'big day'; but that Sunday morning was overcast, threatening, and windy enough to raise havoc with the large baskets of flowers and other decorations lovingly placed the night before. However, bride, groom, and attendants, along with eighty guests and the presiding justice of the peace arrived only a little late; and the ceremony went off with only one minor hitch—a snake slithered past as the maid of honor was reading one of Mr. Whittier's poems describing his grandmother's wedding day and arrival at the old homestead. As the last photographs were being taken, the rain began!

"For September 28th and 29th the Essex National Heritage Commission encouraged the general public to participate in special events sponsored at fifty different sites in Essex County and advertised as *Trails and Sails: A Weekend of Walks and Water*. In anticipation of this event, Scott started toying (and wound up by just plain toiling) with the idea of establishing a permanent outdoor walking tour at the Birthplace. Called the Freeman Memorial Trail in honor of Donald C. Freeman, this tour has thirteen different sites,

including the well sweep, the burying ground, Fernside Brook, and the barn. All the sites are highlighted by specific quotes from Whittier's own writings or those of his biographers. Response from the initial trailblazers has been enthusiastic.

"Then the weekend of October 19-20 was a very busy one. Late Saturday afternoon, about dusk, approximately 175 Boy Scouts and their leaders arrived for a 'camporee'. They enjoyed an evening meal and then took part in what was billed as a *Walk in the Dark*. Each troop was required to complete a series of tasks—in the dark—and no one slept. When we awoke on Sunday morning, we weren't surprised to see a very weary group leaning against the barn, awaiting transportation home—and to bed, we imagine. That afternoon, the amateur poetry group, *Tapestry of Voices*, met here for a reading of Whittier's poetry and their own original works.

"Finally a recent telephone call resulted in the Birthplace receiving a wonderful gift. Mrs. Nancy Strisik of Rockport, MA, told us that she had formerly lived in Haverhill and, in 1964, had done an oil painting of the house, which she wanted to present to the museum. She and her sister drove here a few days later, and her gift now hangs over the fireplace in the 'borning room', a fine addition to the room in which Whittier was born."



THE HAVERHILL PUBLIC LIBRARY

On June 1, 1964, the Whittier Cooperative Bank moved to its new headquarters at One Washington Square. Then Bank President William R. Shepherd and the Board of Directors commissioned Richard Michael Gibney of Newburyport, MA, to paint a twenty-foot mural behind the teller's counter depicting the life and scenes from John Greenleaf Whittier's poems. On April 5, 1982, the Whittier cooperative Bank and the Haverhill Co-operative Bank merged and moved once again. Mr. Stephen Valavanis, a local resident, expressed his concern as to what would happen to the mural. Through his persistence, he was able to salvage it. The mural was offered to the city, but they declined. Mr. Valavanis offered it to Howard W. Curtis, then director of the library. Due to the weight and size of the mural, it has been kept in storage until an appropriate place could be found. Joseph R. Dionne, outgoing library director, determined a suitable location.

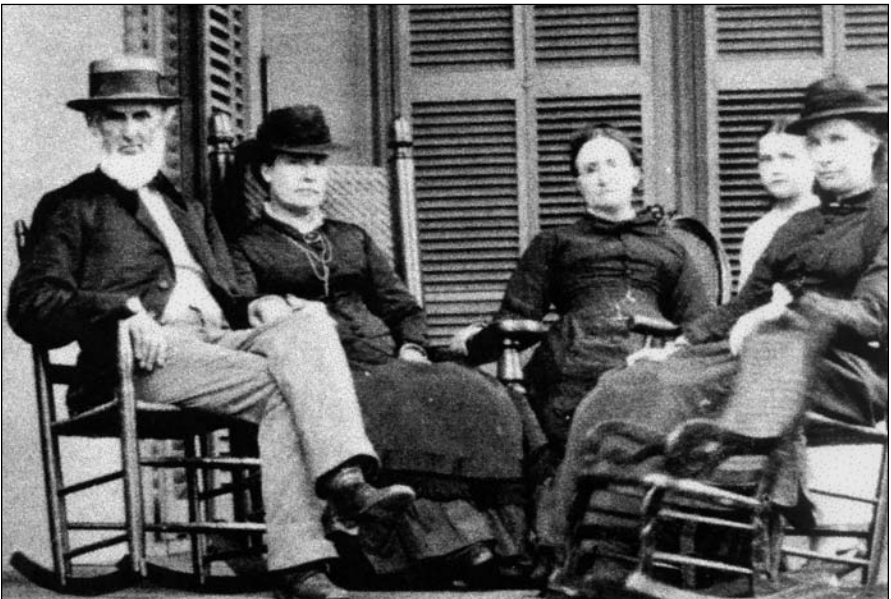
The Trustees of the Haverhill Public Library were pleased to be able to hang a bit of history on the wall overlooking a statue of the Barefoot Boy located on the main floor of the

library. On February 28, 2002, officials of the Haverhill Co-operative Bank and the City of Haverhill, as well as members of the Whittier Club's Board and Trustees were invited to attend a brief *Unveiling Ceremony*.

Haverhill Public Library Director Joseph R. Dionne has left his post to take a job as head of the Nashua, NH, Public Library. Leaving Haverhill's library has nothing to do with the city's budget and a lot to do with wanting to be closer to daughter Jessica and granddaughters, Molly Elizabeth, 4, and Lillian Marlene, 7 months, of Milford, NH. Also, Dionne was assistant library director in Nashua 25 years ago.

Dionne and his wife Martha plan to look for a home in the Nashua area. However, Dionne has nothing but good to say about Haverhill. "I've never worked anywhere where people are so gracious to their library. It's really a unique partnership," he said. The library is staffed with public dollars but run by a private board of trustees, who cover operating expenses and buy books. Caught in a general city fiscal crisis, the library has had to lay off workers and cut back on hours for the Special Collections Room. Dionne arrived at the library on January 1, 2000. Looking back on his two and a half years at the helm of the library, Dionne is proud of making the John Greenleaf Whittier Collection more accessible to customers.

The Mayor and Trustees of the Haverhill Public Library recently announced the results of a national search for a new library director. Mrs. Nancy Rea of the Arundel County Library System in Annapolis, Maryland, has accepted the position as library director and will start on March 17, 2003. Nancy has worked as a senior librarian in the Arundel County System since 1991, where she has accepted increasing levels of leadership and responsibility. Her roots are in Massachusetts. She attended Wheaton College in Norton, Massachusetts, graduating Phi Beta Kappa. She achieved her Master's in Library Science at the University of Maryland.



*On the veranda of Oak Knoll in Danvers, MA. about 1879.
Left to right: John Greenleaf Whittier, Abby Johnson, Woodman,
Mary E. Johnson, Phoebe Woodman, Carolyn Cartland Johnson.*

Greg Laing reports that a Whittier relative, Barbara McClench Davidson from Alexandria, Virginia, has sent on a good photograph of a portrait of Edmund Johnson who was the father of the three Johnson sisters with whom the poet lived at their home, Oak Knoll in Danvers, Massachusetts, during many winters from 1876 until his death. This portrait hung at Oak Knoll and came to Mrs. Davidson's grandfather after the estate was sold. She also sent along a copy of another photograph, which shows Whittier on the veranda at Oak Knoll with the three sisters and Phoebe Woodman, the adopted daughter of Abby Johnson Woodman.

In November, 2002, the home of Whittier's fellow author and admirer, Harriet Prescott Spofford, was put on the auction block. The event attracted much local media attention – but failed to sell at the expected price of \$1.2 million. The house, located on Deer Island in the Merrimack River next to the historic Chain Bridge, which connects Newburyport to the Amesbury shore, was built in 1795 to serve as the residence of the toll keeper. It was occupied by Ebenezer Pearson, who operated a tavern long known for its jovial gatherings. It was here that the famed Lord Timothy Dexter gave his notorious 4th of July speech (or harangue) in 1793 at the opening of the bridge, he being the largest shareholder. It was also the location of the fraudulent robbery of Major Elijah P. Goodrich in 1816.

The house was purchased by Dr. Richard Spofford in 1874 and was a residence until the death of Mrs. Spofford in 1921. Mrs. Spofford was a nationally recognized author on good taste, household decoration and short stories. Her romantic short stories appeared in the Atlantic Monthly and other popular magazines. Her friendship with Whittier spanned many years, and she was the subject of at least one of his poems:

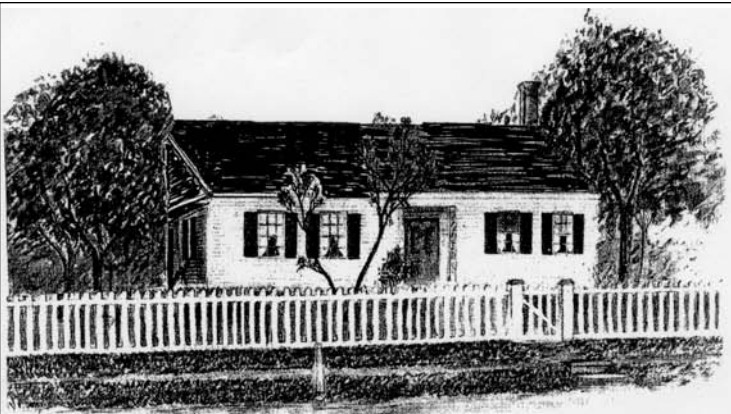
*I see thy home, set like an eagle's nest
Among Deer Island's immemorial pines,...*

THE ELIZABETH H. WHITTIER CLUB

The officers of the Elizabeth H. Whittier Club for this year are: Elizabeth Dostie, President; Dianne Cole, Vice-President; Geraldine Wallace, Recording Secretary; Cynthia Costello, Corresponding Secretary; Donna Simpson, Treasurer; Edna Naumetz, Assistant Treasurer; and Lorraine Reid, Auditor.

During the past year the Elizabeth H. Whittier Club donated toys to poor children for Christmas, gave donations to the Veteran's Hospital, and awarded a \$1,000.00 scholarship to an outstanding Amesbury High senior. In addition the club held eight meetings, always on the third Monday of each month from October to May, in the Social Hall of St. Joseph's Church. In keeping with its aims to encourage women in all areas and to benefit the Amesbury community at large, the club's meetings featured talks on various topics. Appropriately, Frances Dowd opened the speaker series with a biography and commentary on the poet's beloved sister, Elizabeth Hussey Whittier.

In April the club held a special meeting, co-sponsored by the Whittier Home Association, which featured a talk by Professor Ben Pickard, a Whittier scholar, now retired from the University of Florida. Professor Pickard's topic was "A House Becomes a Home: The Women of the Amesbury Whittier Home." In his account of how the house changed from a four-room, one-story cottage to its present size, Pickard emphasized the roles that Whittier's mother Abigail, his sister Elizabeth, his niece, Lizzie Whittier Pickard, and finally Emily B. Smith played in making it a home for and then a memorial to the poet. These women were not only domestic caretakers who cleaned house and cooked meals, but they also provided the much-needed emotional warmth, family love, psychological support and personal security that permitted Whittier to pursue his reform interests and poetry writing.



Whittier Home at Amesbury, 1836



The Home in 1848

FROM A WASH DRAWING BY CATHERINE CAMERON CAPLAN



Whittier Home at Amesbury c.1900

When the Whittiers moved into the home in 1836, a small ell was added at the eastern end as a bedroom for Aunt Mercy and an attic bedroom was finished for Elizabeth. Still the house remained a crowded one for its four occupants with little space for literary visitors and almost none for Whittier's writing. An English philanthropist and admirer of the poet gave Whittier the money needed to expand the house in 1847. A second story with two bedrooms was added on the eastern end, a downstairs bedroom was expanded and made into a study ("the Garden Room") and finally a one-story kitchen ell was added at the western end. This was the way the house remained with a few minor alterations until 1884.

The years in-between, though, had taken a terrible toll. Abigail died in 1857, and her daughter Elizabeth seven years later. This latter death brought Whittier his deepest emotional loss, one he never fully recovered from, as the years passed. The Amesbury home, however, became more precious because of its intimate association with his mother's and Elizabeth's lives. His emotional center now shifted to his niece Lizzie, who came to live with him in 1863. With her marriage in 1876, Whittier's life changed dramatically again, as he went to live with his Johnson cousins in Danvers, Massachusetts. At the Amesbury house, Judge George W. Cate and his wife Caroline became permanent caretakers with Whittier returning when he wished and occupying Elizabeth's old bedroom. This did not give the Cates much room themselves; so, in 1884, Whittier added a second story of two bedrooms to the west wing of the house.

At Whittier's death in 1892 the house passed into the hands of his niece Lizzie. The Cates moved out; and the Whittier Home Association, under the leadership of Emily B. Smith, leased the house for five years. At the lease's end, in 1903, Lizzie's husband, Samuel T. Pickard, his son Greenleaf and wife Miriam moved into the house and undertook major alterations for the living quarters while preserving most of the older part of the house as a Whittier museum. The Pickards removed the old kitchen ell and built a large, two-story ell on the western end of the house. This addition had a large kitchen, with a cellar underneath, and a pantry. Upstairs were a porch, large bedroom and a bathroom. An attic room was also finished at this time. After the deaths of his father and first wife, Greenleaf Pickard remarried and their second child was born in the Whittier house. By 1917, Greenleaf felt he needed more space for his growing family and he and his wife decided to move to Boston that summer. The Amesbury house was then sold to the Whittier Home Association and thus preserved as the National Historic Site it is today.

THE AMESBURY WHITTIER HOUSE

Much has occurred in and around the Amesbury Home this year. Richard Gale, a landscape architect, designed and installed a new grape arbor in the garden. In August a \$10,000 grant from the Provident Bank Community Foundation provided for the installation of a comprehensive fire alarm protection system. Inside the house much restoration work still goes on: the 1820 portrait of Harriet Livermore has been cleaned and restored; the painting of the ship "Whittier," is still being cleaned and repaired; a glass dome was purchased to protect the daguerreotypes of Hannah Whittier Good and her husband on the nightstand in Elizabeth's room; and finally all the contents of the house have been appraised. A special photograph of Whittier surrounded by floral tributes on his 80th birthday has also been purchased and is now on display.

The past year proved to be a busy one for the Amesbury Whittier Home. Annie Tunstall gave an October talk on the Treasures of Russia; in December a Candlelight Open House was held; in February Dianne Cole talked about the Reverend James C. Fletcher and his friendship with Whittier (see below for an account of the talk); during April the club sponsored a joint talk with the Elizabeth Whittier Club (see above in Elizabeth H. Whittier Club); and in August there was a poetry reading by the *Tapestry of Voices* group.

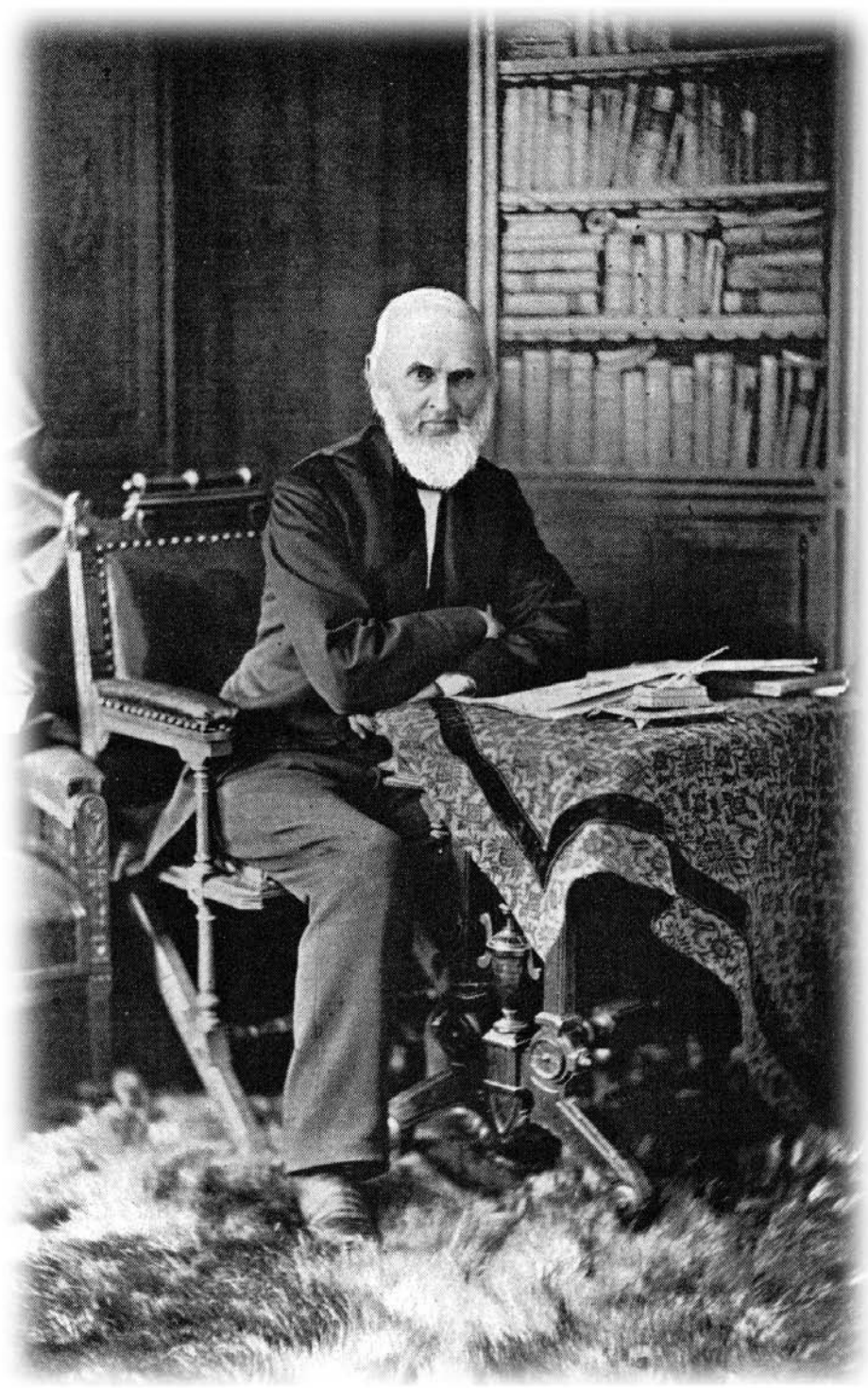
The club also created a special committee, headed by horticulturist Annie Tunstall, for the replanting and maintenance of the Whittier gravesite in Union Cemetery. In recent years the plot has become overrun with poison ivy, trees and weeds. It was decided to remove the old hedge and cedar tree, straighten out the curbing and put in new grass and plantings. Finally proper signs will be installed to direct visitors to the gravesite. The Town of Amesbury is assisting in this project.

The February talk by Dianne Cole discussed the life of Reverend James Cooley Fletcher, a Congregational minister and missionary who lived in Newburyport for many years. As an admirer of both Whittier's poetry and his religious beliefs, he translated a number of Whittier's poems into Portuguese and became a friend of the poet and his sister. He and Whittier often discussed their religious beliefs and the poet had Fletcher read the poem, "Our Master," before it was published to obtain his criticisms and comments. Whittier also spent time with Fletcher at his tent on Salisbury beach and published "The Tent on the Beach" during this period. After Whittier's death Fletcher wrote an article "Whittier's Christian Belief" in which he commented: "Since the death of Whittier, Unitarians and Universalists have claimed him as one of themselves. Perhaps I knew him as well as any of them, for my acquaintance extended over 35 years, for 10 of which he was my neighbor. We used to meet in each other's homes or in my tent on Salisbury Beach. In all these interviews we talked freely of religion, and his opinions I heard from his own lips. Even after we separated, as I went to Brazil and then to Europe, spending a large part of my life abroad, we kept up a correspondence, which was interrupted by no distance of land or sea. After this long intimacy, I feel I am able to testify as to what he believed." Ms. Cole also discussed the impressive estate that Fletcher Built on the headlands of the Merrimack River, an imitation Gothic Castle built of diorite and other native rock. In addition she displayed a photograph of Fletcher with both the poet and his sister in front of their Amesbury house. She concluded her talk with the comment: "Both Whittier and Fletcher were naturalists, had Christian beliefs, antislavery convictions and were great humanitarians whose words and actions contributed to society during their lifetimes."

WHITTIER MISCELLANY

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 accessible at:

www.johngreenleafwhittier.com





Kitchen at John Greenleaf Whittier Birthplace, looking towards pantry.