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John Greenleaf Whittier in Maine

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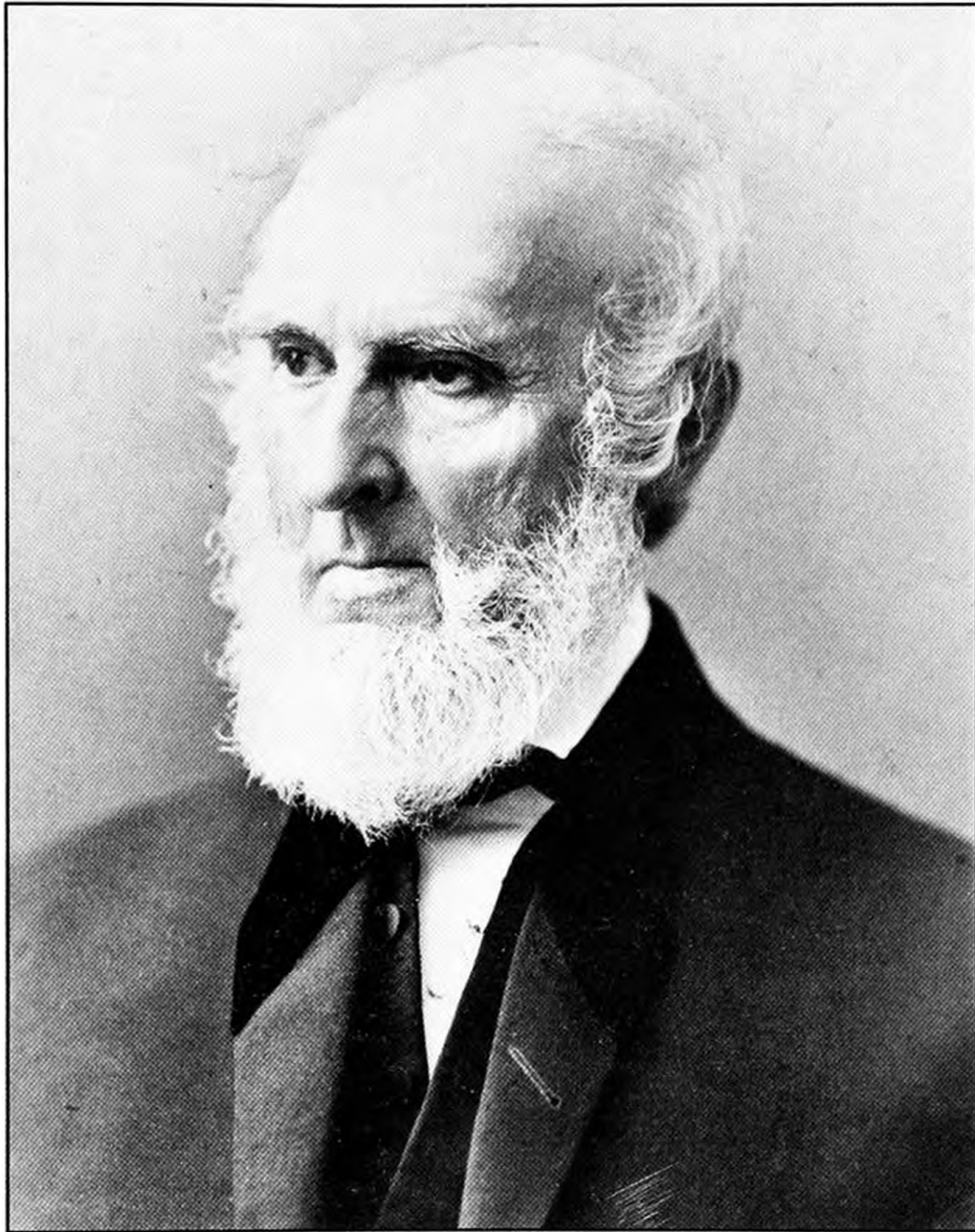
FROM THE COLLECTIONS

JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER IN MAINE

Born in the same year as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the poet John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892) shared with this great contemporary an abiding interest in the State of Maine. The Quaker poet drew on down-east history, legend, geography, and people in creating such memorable works as "Norumbega," "The Dead Ship of Harpswell," "The Lumbermen," "Mogg Megone," "The Funeral Tree of Sokokis," and the popular "Maude Muller." The latter poem, based on a young country woman glimpsed by Whittier during a ride through York County, is commemorated by a stone marker on Route 91 between York and South Berwick. Whittier visited Portland often because it was the site of Friends' Yearly meetings and home to his niece Lizzie. Her husband, Samuel T. Pickard, was editor-publisher of the *Portland Transcript* and Whittier's biographer.

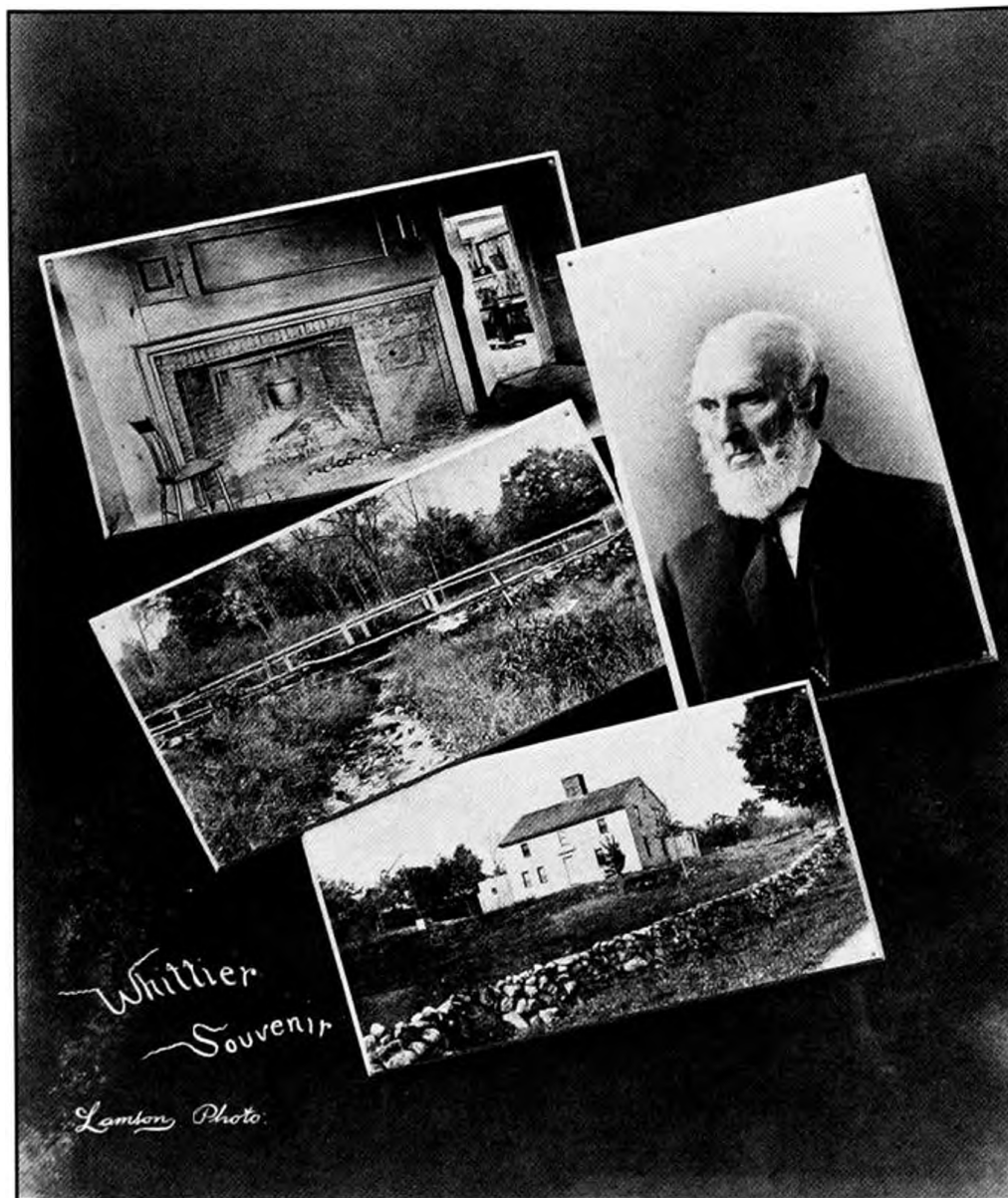
Not surprisingly, a good amount of Whittier material is scattered through the collections of the Maine Historical Society. Aside from a solid set of imprints and several signed letters, MHS holdings include the ongoing "Records of the Fraternity Club" (MS Coll. 149). Pickard was secretary and treasurer of this social and literary society, whose members often discussed Whittier's verse. According to the club history, Whittier made at least one guest appearance.

There are also two photographs of Whittier from the studio of Joseph Harris Lamson (1841-1902) of Portland. The first is a formal likeness, the second a "Whittier Souvenir" which juxtaposes the likeness with interior and exterior views of the subject's Haverhill, Massachusetts, birthplace. The key to understanding the circumstances in which these photographs were made is found among the papers of Portland photographer William Henry Gay (1856-1934) in MS Coll. S-837a. Gay began working for Lamson in 1881 and left an amusing account of his boss's repeated, unsuccessful attempts to photograph Whittier during the latter's trips to Portland. Gay asked if he could try and



Joseph Harris Lamson, American (1841-1902), *Portrait of John Greenleaf Whittier*, photograph, 6-1/2 x 4 1/8. Collection of the Maine Historical Society

was given the go-ahead. He called on Pickard with a letter of introduction, met the poet at City Hall, but got no commitment. Gay returned to Pickard's office but was politely told a session could only happen if Whittier had time.



William Henry Gay, American (1856-1934), *Whittier Souvenir* for Lamson Studio, photographic image, 9 3/4 x 8 3/4. Collection of the Maine Historical Society.

Undaunted, Gay next offered to take the Pickards, and their famous uncle, on a ride “upon the Western Promenade – down through Deering Oaks, up by the Old Eastern Cemetery to Fort Allen Park.” His offer was accepted and Gay recalled: “On our return we passed the birth place of Henry Wadsworth

Longfellow. Such a ride was an inspiration. We finally drove to the Lamson Studio on Temple [Street] where Mrs. Pickard invited Mr. Whittier upstairs while she had her picture taken. Unsuspectingly, Mr. Whittier fell into the trap. Being in the studio he could not very well refuse this request." Nor could Lamson refuse Gay's request to go to Haverhill to make photographs of the Whittier birthplace. The resulting "Whittier Souvenir" is a unique tribute from two Mainers to an admired literary figure. The copy at MHS was donated by Society Librarian and historian Nathan Goold.

William David Barry