

Continuum of Greatness

*The Hall of Fame for Great Americans
at Bronx Community College , CUNY*



John Greenleaf Whittier

1807-1892

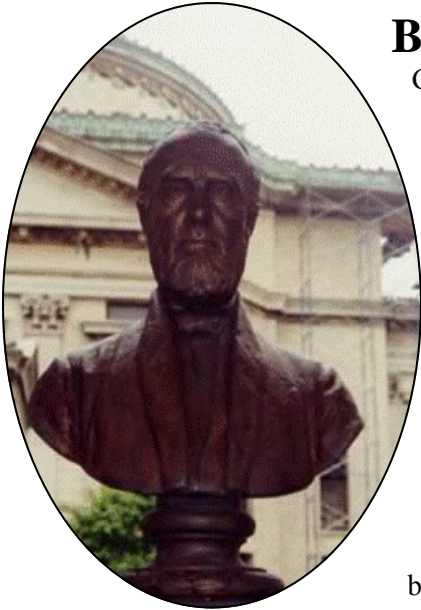
*“Making his rustic reed of song
A weapon in the war with wrong,
Yoking his fancy to the breaking-plough
That beam-deep turned the soil for truth to
spring and grow.”*

Hall of Fame Facts

- Elected to the Hall of Fame in 1905.
- Received 53 votes, 5 more than required that year.
- Sculpted by Rudolph Evans, 1928.

John Greenleaf Whittier

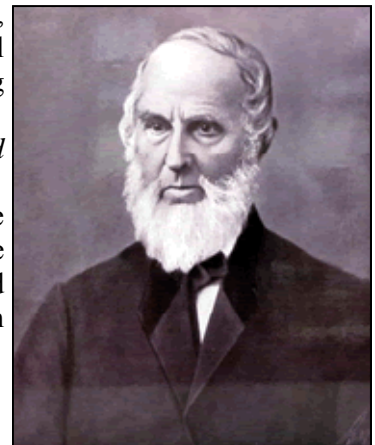
December 17, 1807-September 7, 1892



Born in 1807 in Haverhill, Massachusetts, the poet, editor, and activist John Greenleaf Whittier devoted much of his early career to the abolitionist cause. At the moment technological developments and growing literacy rates combined to make the popular press explode in the United States, he harnessed the power of the printed word to give a voice to the abolitionists. Although his reform activities made him a controversial figure, after the Civil War Whittier became a beloved American writer.

Whittier was the second child of Quakers John and Abigail (Hussey) Whittier, and he spent his childhood working on the farm that had been in his father's family for generations. Although the local school was only in session twelve weeks a year, one of Whittier's teachers encouraged his writing. In 1826, his sister sent one of his poems, "The Exile's Departure," to *The Newburyport Free Press*; the editor William Lloyd Garrison published it and also visited the Whittier farm, encouraging the budding poet to pursue a more formal education. Whittier earned money to send himself to Haverhill Academy by making shoes and teaching. After completing his studies in 1829, he held a series of editing positions and published his first book, *Legends of New England in Prose and Verse* (1831).

In 1833, Garrison, one of the founders the American Anti-Slavery Society, reached out to Whittier. "Whittier enlist!—Your talents, zeal, influence—are all needed!" the reformer declared. Whittier responded enthusiastically, helping draft the society's Declaration of Sentiments. He published the pamphlet *Justice and Expediency; or, Slavery Considered with a View to Its Rightful and Effectual Remedy, Abolition* in 1833, and Whittier soon began to travel throughout New England to garner support for pro-abolition candidates. He eventually became a secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society and was elected to the Massachusetts State Legislature, serving from 1835-1836. The poet assumed editorship of the *Pennsylvania Freeman* in 1838, while continuing to publish poetry, including verse devoted to the abolitionist cause.



1831
↓
William Lloyd Garrison
founds *The Liberator*.

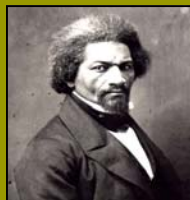
1845
↓
The North Star, edited by Frederick
Douglass, begins publication.

1848
↓
Elizabeth Cady Stanton writes the
Declaration of Sentiments, presented at a
women's rights convention at Seneca Falls

1868
↓
Susan B. Anthony and
Elizabeth Cady Stanton
begin to publish *The
Revolution*.



1833
↓
John Greenleaf Whittier pub-
lishes *Justice and
Expediency*.



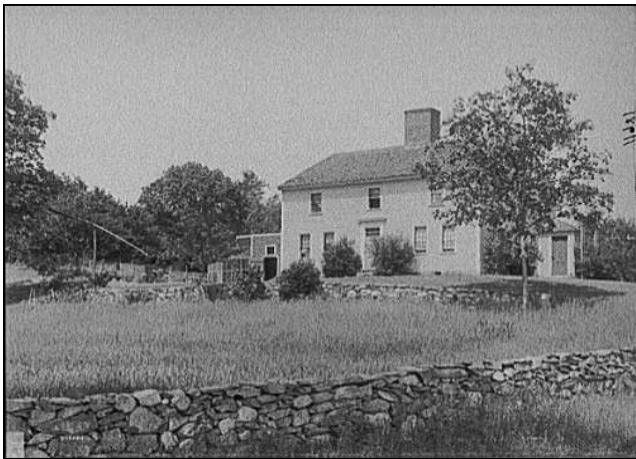
1863
↓
Abraham Lincoln issues the Emancipation
Proclamation

1870
↓
The Fifteenth Amendment protects the right to
vote on the basis of race, color, and previous
condition of servitude—but not sex.

Of his abolitionist writings, Whittier noted, “They were written with no expectation that they would survive the occasions which called them forth: they were protests, alarm signals, trumpet-calls to action, words wrung from the writer’s heart, forged at white heat, and of course lacking the finish and careful word-selection which reflection and patient brooding over them might have given.” Whittier’s devotion to abolition gave his life purpose, but it cost him as well. Many publications refused to publish his work, his political career stalled, and, more than once, he was pelted by rocks thrown by anti-abolitionist mobs.

Despite his friendship with Garrison, by 1839 their differing views over the tactics the abolitionist movement should use had become a source of conflict. Garrisonians called for the immediate end of abolition, refused to work within the existing political system, believing it was inherently corrupted by slavery, and expanded their interests to women’s rights. Whittier, however, wanted to use whatever means necessary to end slavery and felt the focus should remain squarely on that issue until the goal was accomplished. In 1840, Whittier helped found the Liberty Party, which nominated abolitionist candidates for president and vice-president. That same year, he encouraged Charles Sumner, an ardent abolitionist, to run for Senate. Soon afterwards, however, Whittier’s frail health caused him to move to Amesbury, Massachusetts, where his family had relocated after selling the farm. He withdrew from most active political involvement, although he continue publish widely on the subject of abolition.

Beyond his abolitionist writings, Whittier’s verse often celebrated New England’s history and everyday life. In 1866, he published *Snow-Bound*, a long poem which became his most famous work. The publication brought him wide popularity and financial security. In 1887, a group of Quakers founded Whittier, California, named to honor the poet; Whittier Academy, now known as Whittier College, was established in the town the same year. The poet died in 1892 in Hampton Falls, New Hampshire.



The John Greenleaf Whittier Homestead, the farm where Whittier grew up, is now a museum in Haverhill, Massachusetts. The farm served as the setting for Snow-Bound, one of Whittier’s most successful poems, as well as appearing in many of his other works.

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 Graphic design and layout by Chrystal Joseph

1906
 ↓
 Sinclair Lewis’ novel *The Jungle* highlights the corruption of the meat industry.

1920
 ↓
 The Nineteenth Amendment gives the vote to American women.

1963
 ↓
 Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech is broadcast to televisions across the country.

1964
 ↓
 The Civil Rights Act passes.



1965
 ↓
 Ralph Nader publishes *Unsafe at Any Speed*.

1971
 ↓
 Ms. Magazine begins publication.

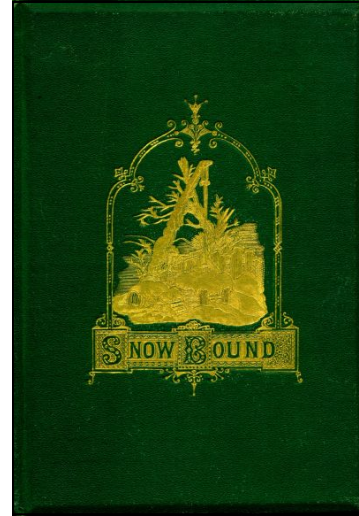
1998
 ↓
 Moveon.com harnesses the power of the Internet to advocate for social change.

2008
 ↓
 will.i.am creates the music video “Yes We Can” using one of Barack Obama’s speeches, launching an Internet—and fundraising—phenomena.



Selected Publications of John Greenleaf Whittier

Among the Hills (1869)
At Sundown (1890)
Hazel-Blossoms (1875)
Home Ballads (1860)
In War Time (1864)
Justice and Expediency (1833)
Lays of My Home (1843)
Legends of New England in Prose and Verse (1831)
Miriam and Other Poems (1871)
Moll Pitcher (1832)
Poems (1838)
Poems by John G. Whittier (1849)
Poetical Works (1857)
Snow-Bound (1866)
Songs of Labor (1850)
St. Gregory's Guest (1886)
The Chapel of the Hermits (1853)
The Complete Poetical Works of John Greenleaf Whittier (1894)
The Panorama (1846)
The Tent on the Beach (1867)
The Vision of Echard (1878)
Voices of Freedom (1846)



Sources Consulted and Further Reading

- Kribbs, Jayne K. ed. *Critical Essays on John Greenleaf Whittier*. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980.
- Mordell, Albert. *Quaker Militant, John Greenleaf Whittier*. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1969.
- Pickard, John B. *John Greenleaf Whittier: An Introduction and Interpretation*. NY: Barnes & Noble, 1961.
- Pickard, John B. ed. *The Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1975.
- Pollard, John A. *John Greenleaf Whittier, Friend of Man. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1969.*
- Wagenknecht, Edward. *John Greenleaf Whittier: A Portrait in Paradox*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1967.

Links:

Complete Works of Whittier
<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/9600>

John Greenleaf Whittier Homestead
<http://www.johngreenleafwhittier.com/>

John Greenleaf Whittier, Perspectives in American Literature
<http://web.csustan.edu/english/reuben/pal/chap4/whittier.html>

John Greenleaf Whittier, Representative Poetry Online
<http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poet/356.html>

John Greenleaf Whittier, Instructor Resources, Heath Anthology of American Literature,
<http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/bassr/heath/syllabuild/iguide/whittier.html>

Whittier's Autobiography in Letter Form
<http://www.kimopress.com/biograph.htm>

Whittier College
<http://www.whittier.edu/About/MissionValuesAndHistory/History/default.aspx>