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The Whittier Museum GAZETTE

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The Freedom Writer

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John Greenleaf Whittier
Dec 17, 1807–Sep 7, 1892

This month we commemorate our great city's namesake – John Greenleaf Whittier. Whittier was born on December 17, 1807 to a rural household. The second child of John and Abigail (Hussey), Whittier was obligated to help out around the family farm. However, he soon discovered that his body was not predisposed to hard labor; his frailty would shadow him throughout his lifetime. To occupy himself, he

poured over his father's tracts on Quakerism, absorbing the ideology that would become the foundation for his future.

Whittier was introduced to poetry by a teacher. His first poem, *The Exile's Departure* was published on June 8, 1826 by the soon-to-be famous abolitionist and social reformer William Lloyd Garrison. Indeed, piqued by his newfound affection for the written word, John G. Whittier would also become a prominent voice during the Civil War.

Whittier initially had political ambitions, but in 1833, his passion for reform preponderated politics. Encouraged by William L. Garrison to join the abolitionist cause, Whittier surrendered to his conscience. That same year he published an antislavery pamphlet entitled *Justice and Expediency*. Because of its tendentious nature, the pamphlet alienated both northern businessmen and southern slaveholders. Whittier's chances for office were reduced to nil and

Among other activities at this time, Whittier formed the Anti-Slavery Society and was an invaluable recruiter for the abolitionist cause. Sometimes he was unsuccessful, as when he tried to convince transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson to join his defunct Liberty Party. But ever steadfast in the wake of bleak turns, Whittier stood his moral ground despite the slow fracturing of his party and the abolitionist movement.

In his later life, Whittier resided in Danvers, Massachusetts with his cousins at their Oak Knoll estate. He wrote his most enduring poem, *Snowbound*, during this time.

After a lifetime of upholding the ideals of Quakerism, John Greenleaf Whittier could finally put his feeble frame to rest. The man passed on September 7, 1892; his legacy lives on in this, our City of Whittier.