

John Greenleaf Whittier: NEW ENGLAND TROUBADOUR

John Whittier, "the Barefoot Boy" was born and bred on the family farm just outside Haverhill, Massachusetts. This "farm" which had been in the Whittier family for at least two centuries at the time of John's birth in 1807, was "home" to two sons, two daughters, Mama and Papa Whittier, a bachelor Uncle and a maiden Aunt.

The parents were Quakers, a faith which fit well with their Spartan lifestyle. They earned "their Daily Bread" by "the sweat of their brows" though John himself was plagued throughout life by recurring headaches.

Educational opportunities were limited to perhaps three months out of each year when the children attended local schools conducted by college students seeking tuition money. Needless to say, resources were sparse though sufficient for students to acquire the rudiments of an "education" - readin', ritin' and "rithmatic.

There were a few books available to John at home. This meager Library included the BIBLE, Bunyan's PILGRIM'S PROGRESS and biographies of famous Quakers most likely acquired at the Amesbury Meeting House which the adults and occasionally the children, attended on "First Days". The youngsters participation was determined by "wagon capacity" insofar as the journey was a bit beyond "walking distance".

Scene 1: Whittier Farm, Massachusetts, 1821

John Whittier

Elizabeth Whittier

Elizabeth: WHAT'S THAT BOOK
Thee BE READIN' John ?
I DON'T RECOGNIZE IT.