

Then and Now – The Roper Place A Poet's Interpretation of the Views from Wachusett Mt.

“One of Many Famous Visitors to Mount Wachusett”

Gardner News Reported in 9/25/1897:

“A stranger appeared 30 years earlier at the door of a boarding house early one evening asking for lodging for the night. The landlady reluctantly admitted the ‘tramp’ with some protest by her boards. His clothes were not in the



Roper House circa 1860

best of shape and his shoes showed much wear. The guest was not allowed to eat at the regular supper table and was asked to sleep on an old sofa. It was on such a visit that the regulars secured their valuables and the landlady kept careful watch. The next morning when the ‘tramp’ was leaving, the hostess carefully asked his name. A quiet reply came ‘**John Greenleaf Whittier.**’ The poet always had a place to stay on future trips to the mountain, and was never asked again to sleep on the old sofa.”

John Roper Place:

In 1791, John Roper of Sterling purchased land on the northerly slope of Mt. Wachusett and built there a typical old fashioned New England farm-house probably in anticipation of his marriage to Dorcas Kilburn in 1792. This location, since known as the John Roper Place, was at the end of the old Pine Hill Rd, which curved to the right past the Keys property and onto the northerly slope of the mountain. Today, the end of Pine Hill Rd. has been relocated and the road section, where the house was located, is now discontinued. The foundation of the house still exists, with its very massive center chimney and is next

to today's Sundowner ski slope, although the old well-sweep and the " bucket splashing in the cool, sweet well " have long since vanished.



Distant View of Roper Place Northly Side of Wachusett Mt.

It was in the 1860's that Whittier walked from Amesbury, MA to Princeton to visit a Quaker friend, Miss Elizabeth Howell, who took him to the Roper farm where, he was inspired to write **his famous poem (see end of article)**, and it was Miss Howell, of whom Whittier wrote:

"I would I were a painter, for the sake
Of a sweet picture, and of her who led
A fitting guide, with reverential tread,
Into that mountain mystery."

It was John Roper Junior, with whom John G. Whittier talked, the one who "loved it for his good old mother's sake who lived and died here in the peace of God." The homestead is thus pictured by Whittier:

"The great woods climbed the mountain at our back;
And on their skirts where yet the lingering day
On the shorn greenness of the clearing lay
The brown old farm-house like a bird's nest hung."

In Mrs. Dwinnell's poem "Outing Inn" we have another glimpse of this same old farmhouse and its surroundings.

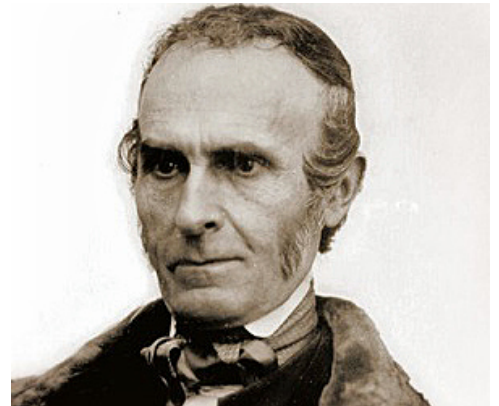
"And on we go, and upward still,
For harder, steeper grows the hill,
To where — stone walls the ways divide,
A dainty farm-house stands, one side,
And where the doors swing open wide,
Just halfway up Wachusett."

For more information about **John Greenleaf Whittier**:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Greenleaf_Whittier

<https://whittierhome.org>

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/john-greenleaf-whittier>



Source - thefamouspeople.com

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This document was assembled and images added to add more meaning, by William "Bud" Brooks during the summer of 2022.



Personal Memories Of Larry Greene Sr.:

Above is the John Roper Place in 1928, to where Professor Lawrence B. Chapman of 182 Thompson Road hiked numerous times over 8 miles with his 14 year old daughter, Lois, his 12 year old son, Charles, and friends to this location for a picnic lunch. After arriving, Professor Chapman often recited Whittier's famous poem "Monadnock from Wachusett" to his audience.



Center Chimney Foundation 12/2021

An alternate explanation furnished by John Mirick May, 2023:

I may be able to add a little something to it. Our house is ca. 1780 and has a large chimney base with several openings, looking very much like your photo above. The openings are not connected to any flue, and could not have functioned as fireboxes. My great Uncle



On all 4 sides of the chimney base in the cellar there appears to be a Firebox. Was that to provide heat for boarders who slept there?

Rob (1888-1986) who was the last of our family to farm the property until about 1930 told me that these openings had tight-fitting doors and were used to store cheese. The cracks where door met stone were sealed with plaster or low-grade mortar which he said was to keep out the mice. The cellar stays cool in the summer, and never froze in the winter unless there was a really, really long spell of intense cold. Straw, leaves and/or hay, held down by pine boughs, were used to bank the sills of the house in the fall which helped to keep the cellar (comparatively) warm.

My guess is that openings into the chimney foundation of the Roper house were similarly used.

Monadnock from Wachusett

I WOULD I were a painter, for the sake
Of a sweet picture, and of her who led,
A fitting guide, with reverential tread,
Into that mountain mystery. First a lake
Tinted with sunset; next the wavy lines
Of far receding hills; and yet more far
Monadnock lifting from his night of pines
His rosy forehead to the evening star. 5
Beside us, purple-zoned, Wachusett laid
His head against the West, whose warm light made
His aureole; and o'er him, sharp and clear, 10
Like a shaft of lightning in mid-launching stayed,
A single level cloud-line, shone upon

By the fierce glances of the sunken sun,
 Menaced the darkness with its golden spear! 15
 So twilight deepened round us. Still and black
 The great woods climbed the mountain at our back;
 And on their skirts, where yet the lingering day
 On the shorn greenness of the clearing lay,
 The brown old farm-house like a bird's-nest hung. 20
 With home-life sounds the desert air was stirred:
 The bleat of sheep along the hill we heard,
 The bucket plashing in the cool, sweet well,
 The pasture-bars that clattered as they fell;
 Dogs barked, fowls fluttered, cattle lowed; the gate 25
 Of the barnyard creaked beneath the merry weight
 Of sun-brown children, listening, while they swung,
 The welcome sound of supper-call to hear;
 And down the shadowy lane, in tinkling's clear,
 The pastoral curfew of the cow-bell rung. 30
 Thus soothed and pleased, our backward path we took,
 Praising the farmer's home. He only spake,
 Looking into the sunset o'er the lake,
 Like one to whom the far-off is most near:
 "Yes, most folks think it has a pleasant look; 35
 I love it for my good old mother's sake,
 Who lived and died here in the peace of God!"
 The lesson of his words we pondered o'er,
 As silently we turned the eastern flank
 Of the mountain, where its shadow deepest sank, 40
 Doubling the night along our rugged road:
 We felt that man was more than his abode,—
 The inward life than Nature's raiment more;
 And the warm sky, the sundown-tinted hill,
 The forest and the lake, seemed dwarfed and dim 45
 Before the saintly soul, whose human will
 Meekly in the Eternal footsteps trod,
 Making her homely toil and household ways
 An earthly echo of the song of praise
 Swelling from angel lips and harps of seraphim.

This document is a collaboration of:

- Joyce Anderson, Princeton Historical Commission - 2007
- Blakes "History of Princeton Vol II"
- Memories of Lawrence Greene Sr. - 2021