

## Bringing Haverhill poem to life

Modern 'Barefoot Boy' poses for book illustrations

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By Mike LaBella

[mllabella@eagletribune.com](mailto:mllabella@eagletribune.com)

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*Haverhill seventh-grader Aaron Zaino was the model for the new Illustrated children's book, *The Barefoot Boy*, which highlights the poem written by John Greenleaf Whittier. The book was written and illustrated by Lisa Greenleaf, a descendant of Whittier.*

HAVERHILL — On a crisp November day in 2009, Aaron Zaino climbed trees at the John Greenleaf Whittier Birthplace, gingerly crossed the historic property shoeless, and stood barefoot on stones in Fernside Brook — where the famous poet fished in his youth. On Sunday, Haverhill's reigning Barefoot Boy will be wearing sneakers when he and professional fine art illustrator Lisa Greenleaf, a

descendent of the Whittier family, sign copies of her new book, "The Barefoot Boy."

It features 27 colorful illustrations that accompany stanzas of Whittier's poem, a reflection of his summer days as a child.

Many of them feature Aaron dressed in a straw hat and rolled up pants, just like the outfit he wore in April 2007 when he was crowned Haverhill's Barefoot Boy. That year the city celebrated Whittier's 200th anniversary and Aaron won the Barefoot Boy Look-Alike Contest, sponsored by the Haverhill Whittier Club and trustees of the Whittier Birthplace.

Aaron had no idea at the time that it would lead to something bigger.

"I think the Barefoot Boy in the book looks a lot like me," said Aaron, 12, a seventh-grader at Whittier Middle School. "I think kids in school will get a good laugh, but I'm sure they'll read it."

Greenleaf can trace her lineage back to Sara Greenleaf, the grandmother of John Greenleaf Whittier, Haverhill's famous poet and abolitionist who lived in the early and mid-1800s. Greenleaf said she hopes the book will find its way into classrooms and make the poem — with a style of language that seems unusual today — more exciting to children.

"If you're not from Haverhill or surrounding towns, you might not be that familiar with Whittier, although most people who are into poetry know him," she said. "A lot of people, such as my father's generation, had to memorize the Barefoot Boy."

Aaron can trace his family lineage to Thomas Dustin and Hannah (Emerson) Dustin, the city's most famous Colonial woman.



When Greenleaf began planning her book several years ago, she came to the place where it all began.

While sitting in Sara Greenleaf's rocking chair in front of the hearth at the Whittier Birthplace, she chatted with curator Gus Reusch about her need for a model. Then she noticed a postcard featuring Aaron Zaino as the Barefoot Boy.



*Author & Illustrator Lisa Greenleaf and Barefoot Boy model Aaron Zaino at the John Greenleaf Whittier's Birthplace, Haverhill, MA*

Reusch put her in touch with the boy's grandmother, Haverhill school principal Judi Zaino, and her husband Arthur Zaino — who had helped create the outfit Aaron wore when he was named the Barefoot Boy of his generation.

"I put a hole in the hat, like in the poem," Arthur Zaino said.

Reusch often visits fifth-grade classrooms and talks about the poet and his works, including "The Barefoot Boy."

He said it can be a challenging read because of Whittier's writing style, and that having an illustrated book should help make the poem more accessible, especially to children.

"Lisa has been saying from day one that we have to get Whittier back into the schools," Reusch said.

Trustees of the birthplace are equally excited about the release of Greenleaf's book.

"I think we'll all be amazed at how well it does," said Trustee Glen Hamilton.

Greenleaf, a graphic designer, fine art illustrator and book publisher lives in Nashua. She has family members throughout the region, including in Amesbury, where Whittier lived in his later years and is buried.

The public is invited to a book launch of "The Barefoot Boy" on Sunday from 1 to 4 p.m. at the Birthplace, 305 Whittier Road, which is just off of Amesbury Road (Route 110).

The event will include live music, food and refreshments. Copies of the book will be available for purchase and signing. A portion of the proceeds will go to the birthplace.

More information is available at  
[www.Lisagreenleaf.com](http://www.Lisagreenleaf.com)  
[www.apprenticeshopbooks.com](http://www.apprenticeshopbooks.com)  
[www.johngreenleafwhittier.com](http://www.johngreenleafwhittier.com).

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Pages from John Greenleaf Whittier's *The Barefoot Boy* book

The opening stanza of John Greenleaf Whittier's  
"The Barefoot Boy"

*Blessings on thee, little man,  
Barefoot boy, with cheek of tan!  
With thy turned-up pantaloons,  
And thy merry whistled tunes;  
With thy red lip, redder still  
Kissed by strawberries on the hill;  
With the sunshine on thy face,  
Through thy torn brim's jaunty grace;  
From my heart I give thee joy,—  
I was once a barefoot boy!  
Prince thou art,—the grown-up man  
Only is republican.  
Let the million-dollared ride!  
Barefoot, trudging at his side,  
Thou hast more than he can buy  
In the reach of ear and eye,—  
Outward sunshine, inward joy:  
Blessings on thee, barefoot boy!*

