Chapter 1: How it all came about

I believe I was Matthew Franklin Whittier in the 1800's; and I want to set his record straight. How I came to that conviction I will describe in this chapter; thereafter I will simply set aside my memories, feelings, and hunches in italics. The rest will be the historical record as it has emerged after five years of research; but it will be interpreted from the point of view of my understanding of his life.

Matthew Whittier was the younger brother of New England Romantic poet John Greenleaf Whittier, known primarily for popular poems like "Snowbound," which idealized his childhood, but also for his work for the cause of Abolition. The brothers grew up in Haverhill, Massachusetts. John (or John Greenleaf as he will be referred to in this book) was born in 1807, and Matthew was born five years later, in 1812. Where Matthew is known in any context independently of his brother, he is remembered for his humorous sketches submitted to the Portland (Maine) "Transcript," and other newspapers, posing as the fictional character, "Ethan Spike." Matthew, himself, does not enjoy a very flattering portrayal in the history. In fact, I would go so far as to say that historians seem to delight in comparing him unfavorably to his brother, simply to make his brother's image shine all the more brightly for posterity. I will be presenting a very different view of both men in this work.

I have very few concrete, tangible, complete memories, as we might remember going to the grocery store last Friday evening. I do seem to have a handful of them, just the briefest glimpses, chiefly where there were powerful emotions connected with the event. Imagine seeing five frames of film suddenly flash and disappear on a darkened screen. It never changes--every time you play it back, all the details are the same. One or two of these also emerged in the course of two past-life hypnotic regression sessions early in the research, and I will quote from them verbatim. The relevant sections are also reproduced in their entirety in the Appendix, along with a representative sampling of my e-mail correspondence with my volunteer researcher over a three-year period.

Primarily, in my waking consciousness as Stephen Sakellarios, what I have are Matthew's emotions. I know precisely how he felt about everything that has come up in the history. My emotions have predicted my historical finds, and the order of what came first is carefully preserved in dated e-mail correspondence with my researcher. Almost everything I felt has turned out to be plausible, though at first glance it may not have seemed so. Only when I began extrapolating possible scenarios from those emotions and my knowledge of the history (especially where the history was inaccurate or misleading), did I find myself occasionally mistaken, and to maintain balance in reporting, I will relate those mistakes as well. It is very tempting to "stretch" one's emotional past-life memory, and the rare glimpse that may sometimes accompany it, into guesses about what may have been happening, especially when the historical record is so full of gaps. But these guesses are not, actually, memories. They are interpretations, and as such, are fallible. One should not jump to the premature conclusion that because one has disproved these kinds of interpretations and speculations, one has necessarily disproved the validity of the emotional memory itself.

I also understand deeply how Matthew's mind works. I understand that he wrote in layers. The top-most layer is humor; the next layer may be political; the next layer, autobiographical, moral or metaphysical. And, I know his character. I know it is not as it has been portrayed in the
When, today, I read aloud Matthew's "Ethan Spike" letters, which were mostly written in dialect, I cannot duplicate the accent. Even as a child, however, I have always loved the "Boston accent." When I first contacted the Haverhill Library, I didn't know that it was pronounced "Hayvrill." I, as Stephen Sakellarios, had to actually train myself to say it that way. Matthew's early article, "Wanderings in the East," contains first-hand accounts of experiences he had traveling up to the Canadian coast--but I don't remember any of them. These are the kinds of things that skeptics judge a case by, but in normal waking consciousness, such memories are not likely to emerge. My former identity as Matthew Franklin Whittier would have to entirely push aside my identity as Stephen Sakellarios, with all its mental associations, in order for this type of memory to come fully to consciousness. But emotions are emotions--they are not dependent on mental associations, and they come through much more readily.

When I say I don't remember any of the experiences Matthew described in "Wanderings in the East," that's not quite true--I remember what I was feeling, and in some peculiar way, how my mind was working--my subjective experience of the creative process, in other words--as I wrote about it. And that sense sort of "kicks in," or perhaps a better description might be "steals upon me," soon after having read it. I don't know what desk he was sitting in or what room he was in, but I know instinctively what his deepest motives were in writing, how he felt about it and what he intended to accomplish with it. Thus, over and over, my subjective experience of studying the life of Matthew Franklin Whittier has been like a man with almost total amnesia, whose emotions gradually start welling up from the depths. After several days of deeply immersing myself in this history, I find my mood changing--I feel more frustrated, more angry at society, more put-upon; more worried about my career (such as it is, even today). More inclined, and better able, to make store clerks laugh. More inclined to inadvertently say something cutting that hurts someone's feelings. My writing, though I am no slouch as a writer today, gets even better. This is not a parlor game--"past life bleed-through" is a phenomenon that has been documented in other cases, as for example the Bruce Kelly/James Johnston case.¹ I don't recommend that such studies be taken up casually.

In the two regression sessions, where I was put into a relatively light hypnotic trance, what appeared to be actual memories came through more readily. They were still glimpses, but perhaps I got 25 frames, as it were, instead of only 5; and they stayed visible longer. Disappointingly, I did not experience the kind of full immersion experience that some good hypnotic subjects report during past-life regression. In a deep hypnotic trance, some subjects have recalled historically verifiable facts, figures, full names and dates. I was not in such a deep trance, nor am I a good subject, but I did have a vision of one historical event that might be verifiable. The location has already been determined to my satisfaction by recognizing it in a photograph, and then learning afterwards that it was coincidentally right in Matthew's old Portland, Maine neighborhood (I only knew it was somewhere in Portland).

I also employed psychics for this research on two occasions.² Where they got strong "hits," I will reference that the information was from a psychic reading, and I will keep this material, also, in italics. Where I cite material gained through psychics, I will preface it by explaining what they could possibly have known beforehand by normal means at the time the reading was given.

After five years of research, I can say this much--if I stick with my emotions and the brief
glimpses that occasionally accompany them, while resisting the temptation to stretch them into speculations, the recorded history proves them plausible. Only on rare occasions, however, has it proved them outright. If further evidence emerges in the form of diaries and personal correspondence, which are more likely to contain emotional content, it may yield more proof of this type.

Sometimes it will be difficult to separate out my own subjective impressions from the recorded history. I ask your indulgence if the one category occasionally encroaches on the other. The more you delve into the records of the past, the more it dawns upon you that there is, really speaking, no such thing as "objective history." No-one is truly objective—and all historical reports come from human beings. There is, therefore, only subjective history that has received the official stamp of approval, vs. subjective history that has not. Where the subject is Matthew Franklin Whittier, I find that the recorded history which has the official stamp of approval has been especially subjective—and grossly unfair. If nobody else will do anything about it, I intend to.

Matthew felt misunderstood, and studying the history with a fresh eye, I would say he was justified. I think he felt a great deal of frustration, which over time became bitterness. If my views at times appear too negative, keep in mind that I am reflecting my deepest feelings while responding to the history, and that this lack of objectivity, far from disproving the proposed past-life match, may actually be evidence for it. I will try to be fair in my appraisal of the main characters—but I must also be true to myself, because these feelings are, precisely, my paranormal "data." As Obi-Wan Kenobi said in "Star Wars," "Trust your feelings, Luke!" I must likewise trust my feelings--and if they are overboard, then it is Matthew whose feelings are overboard.

But if you remain with me through this narrative, you will encounter a fundamental paradigm shift, and that paradigm shift can be stated very simply: the Whittier family, reflecting the psychological and emotional dysfunction of Puritan society, was itself severely dysfunctional. The father was too harsh and emotionally distant, which may have been quite normal for that day and time—but the real problem was that the mother must have had a kind of split personality. She must have had a cruel streak that could suddenly emerge at any time, and which could not be prevented by any amount of good behavior. The glowing historical descriptions of her character would actually fit right in with this personality profile--because one should be careful about trusting anyone who appears too saintly. It may be real sainthood, but more likely it's an indication of something far more complicated. I am fond of the analogy of the "missing planet"--the way that astronomers can predict the existence of an invisible planet is through observing the gravitational effects it has on the orbits of the visible planets.

If, armed with a knowledge of psychodynamics (I hold a masters in Counseling and Human Systems from Florida State University), we get to know these people well, and if we set aside the myth that has grown up around them, this interpretation of the mother's character is the only thing I can see that would account for all the elements.

Put this missing puzzle-piece back in, and the entire scene shifts. John Greenleaf Whittier is still a brilliant poet--but he's crippled with a neurotic reaction which he successfully hides under the cloak of "Quakerism." He suffers debilitating headaches, especially under emotionally stressful circumstances, and his health is frail. So is his sister, Elizabeth's. Their oldest sister, Mary, who marries out of the family, is physically healthy, but eventually she leaves her husband, Jacob
Caldwell, who then hangs himself in the barn. She returns to the neighborhood, but lives down the street. When John Greenleaf is appointed executor of Caldwell's estate, he gets severe headaches and becomes seriously ill. Within this new paradigm, Matthew Franklin Whittier is still a rebel, but now he becomes a rebel with a cause, rather than a rebel without one. He is the only family member who stands and fights for the truth, and he is vilified for it—even today. In the new paradigm, Matthew's daughter Lizzie still rejects her father, but now she does so because she is drawn into the family denial system, and there is no room for compromise—either her father is a bad person who abandoned her and never loved her, or the family is nuts. She decides her father must be a bad person, because nobody could possibly think this family is nuts—could they? But Lizzie's son, Greenleaf, rebels, sensing the "family lie" as a young boy, which causes him to be labeled a troublemaker like his grandfather, while his uncle remarks that the boy "probably isn't worth rearing."

Meanwhile, unauthorized biographer William Sloan Kennedy writes that Matthew's literary work is not worth serious consideration, and proves "...incontestably that but one genius is born in a family." In short, if John Greenleaf Whittier is a genius, then in order to complete the mythical picture, his brother, by way of comparison, must be a second-rate talent. In the same breath, practically, that Kennedy advises the reader, regarding Matthew's published works, "I should not advise any one to take the trouble to hunt them up," he quotes "Reminiscences of a Newburyport Nonagenarian" by Sarah Smith Emery, in which she describes a visiting vagabond using the colloquial style that Matthew pioneered. This irony, apparently, is entirely lost on him.

This is not a pretty picture, nor a fair one to Matthew, the only family member with enough guts to refuse the family lie. Even then he was quite gentle about it (though his grandson Greenleaf, in his immature years, was not.) Nonetheless, if my assessments are too harsh, I will apologize at the outset, and I will suggest that they reflect Matthew's own deep feelings, and should be viewed accordingly. But I will offer no such excuses solely for having presented this fresh paradigm, because, like Matthew, I have lived my whole life for Truth, and I have no apologies to offer for that.

A few more brief observations. First, although I do not claim to be an expert on the topic, as I study the history of the Whittier family, and as I experience Matthew's feelings about it bubbling (and sometimes boiling) up from the inside, it strikes me that this is really a Puritan family more than a Quaker family, culturally. And as goes the culture, so go the family psychodynamics. Scholars have tried to understand this family as Quakers, and this is where they err. See, for example, this excerpt from Elizabeth Whittier's diary, Feb. 12, 1837 (writing in response to news that a friend is dying of consumption):

Wicked as I am, dare I hope to be better--dare I hope that the infinitely holy son of God has mercy for me! Oh! What am I that I should not die--can my sinful heart ever possess aught of the humanity, purity or meekness or holiness will the strong holds of sin & rebellion within my heart ever yield to the influences of God's spirit--Oh! That pride the worst enemy of my [mine] might be overcome--yet I feel I am unworthy of help from Him who alone can give refuge from the present, ever present & eternal woe. .... The sight of men, women and children, all idolaters, make me shudder, as if in the dominions of the prince of darkness. I fancy the frown of God is visible.
As I type this, as Matthew reincarnated, I question whether it is disrespectful to Elizabeth to use it--and my deep feeling is that she wants me to use it, because she was a victim of "bad religion" and she wants the world to understand and avoid the trap she innocently fell into.

A second point is that John Greenleaf hides his neurotic reaction in the sanctified garb of Quakerism, even though his emotional state is that predicted by Puritanism. Matthew, on the other hand, wants the truth at all costs, and becomes a kind of warrior against hypocrisy. He directs this war at every hint of hypocrisy he ever encounters, except its actual origin. It takes his entire life to face that his beloved brother has emotionally betrayed him for his neurotic refuge (as all neurotics, being essentially addicts, will do). Where Matthew and Quakerism diverge--which they must, for love, since Matthew marries a non-Quaker and is disowned by them--John Greenleaf sides with the Quakers. But it goes deeper than that. Matthew has opted for emotional honesty, with a young woman who is refreshingly honest, while John Greenleaf clings to what he thinks is Quakerism, but which is really a refuge from emotional reality. This is where the brothers part ways.

Thirdly, as I study the history of this family, its community and its times, I see that there are two distinct cultural and religious forces running parallel--Puritanism, or fundamentalist religion, and Spiritualism or metaphysics. It seems to me that it was not only the Puritans who colonized America, but also the occultists (hence, the eye-and-pyramid design on the U.S. dollar bill). The old European war between these two cultural streams had simply been transplanted onto American soil. The Puritans had conquered externally with brute force via the "witch trials," the memory of which was still fresh in New England when Matthew and John Greenleaf were growing up, but they had most certainly not destroyed the rich vein of esotericism running through American culture.

Two historical accounts in Samuel Pickard's "Whittier-land" illustrate the polarized views that New England culture had toward the occult. The first demonstrates violent Puritan suppression in Oak Knoll:

> Here lived the Rev. George Burroughs, who suffered death as a wizard more than two centuries ago. He was a man of immense strength of muscle, and his astonishing athletic feats were cited at his trial as evidence of his dealings with the Evil One. The well of his homestead is shown under the boughs of an immense elm, and the canopy now over it was the sounding-board of the pulpit of an ancient church of the parish so unenviably identified with the witchcraft delusion.⁴

The second shows a more tolerant attitude in Newbury/Newburyport:

> The town took no part in the witchcraft horror, and got none of its old women and town charges hanged for witches. "Goody" Morse had the spirit rappings in her house two hundred years earlier than the Fox girls did, and somewhat later a Newbury minister in wig and knee-buckles rode, Bible in hand, over to Hampton to lay a ghost who had materialized himself and was stamping up and down stairs in his military boots....⁵

In the following account, Matthew's Aunt Mercy sees a vision of her fiance outside the house
before learning that he had passed on:

In her youth, according to the tradition of the family, she was betrothed to a worthy young man. Late one evening, as she sat musing by the fire in the old kitchen, after the rest of the family had retired, she felt impelled to go to the window, and, looking out, she recognized her lover on horseback approaching the house. As she had reason to suppose that he was then in New York, she was surprised at his unexpected return, and his call at so late an hour. Passing the porch window as she hastened to open the door, she saw her lover ride by it, and turn as if to dismount at the step. The next instant the door was open, but no trace of man or horse was to be seen. Bewildered and terrified, she called her sister, who listened to her story, and tried to soothe her and efface the painful impression."Thee had better go to bed, Mercy; thee has been asleep and dreaming by the fire," she said. But Mercy was quite sure she had not been asleep, and what she had seen was as real as any waking experience of her life. In recalling the circumstances of her vision, one by one, she at length took notice that she had heard no sound of hoofs! It may be imagined what was the effect of all this upon the sensitive girl, and she was not unprepared, after a weary waiting of many days, to learn through a letter from New York, written by a strange hand, that her lover had died on the very day, and at the hour, of her vision. In her grief she did not shut herself away from the world, but lived a life of cheerful charity. She did not forget her first love, and gave no encouragement to other suitors.

Since she never went into mourning and yet never accepted any other suitors, I, personally, having studied this area, privately conclude that she kept right on in a spirit relationship with him.

There are other stories in the Whittier history involving some element of proof, as this one does, including this interesting account:

Mr. Whittier had many wonderful stories illustrating the guidance of the spirit to which members of the Society of Friends submitted in the daily intercourse of life. One was of an aged Friend, who never failed to attend meeting on First Day. But one morning he told his wife that he was impelled to take a walk instead of going to meeting, and he knew not whither he should go. He went into the country some distance and came to a lane which led to a house. He was impressed to take this lane, and soon reached a house where a funeral service was in progress. At the close of the service he arose, and said that he knew nothing of the circumstances connected with the death of the young woman lying in the casket, but he was impelled to say that she had been accused of something of which she was not guilty, and the false accusation had hastened her death. Then he added that there was a person in the room who knew she was not guilty, and called upon this person, whoever it might be, to vindicate the character of the deceased. After a solemn pause, a woman arose and confessed she had slandered the dead girl. In telling such stories as this, Mr. Whittier did not usually express full and unreserved belief in their truth, but he maintained the attitude of readiness to believe anything of this kind which was well authenticated, and he approved of the methods of work adopted by the Society for Psychical Research in England.
and in this country. Finally, Pickard reports, in a footnote found in the "Letters," that John Greenleaf, his mother, and his sister Elizabeth frequently attended seances held by a mutual friend, Mary Esther Carter, in the 1840's:

Mary Esther Carter (1817-1903), the daughter of a Newbury sea captain with an independent income, lived in Amesbury for twenty-five years. Her friendship with the Whittiers, especially Elizabeth and Mrs. Whittier, began in the 1840's when a spiritualist circle led by Miss Carter was formed. Whittier, his mother, and Elizabeth sometimes attended these meetings along with other neighbors who hoped to receive messages from the dead.

So aside from Quaker concepts and ideals, these children were also being exposed to both Puritan and esoteric concepts, simultaneously. Of the brothers, it is Matthew who would later embrace esotericism fully, especially, as I feel, late in life. Logically, then, it is more likely that his reincarnation would be doing exactly what I'm doing with this book today. In short, it's not as simple as my having latched onto the idea of being Matthew Franklin Whittier entirely out of context. My claim is actually consistent with, and one might say, predicted by, the history. It is not entirely unexpected, in other words, that Matthew, having studied metaphysics and feeling that his legacy was both misunderstood and forgotten, would reincarnate, find himself in history, and set matters right.

Lastly, a convention. I understand, from my reading of the history, that Quakers used their middle names within the family. (My gut sense is that it was due to some kind of superstition, having to do with "if a child died" or "to prevent a child from dying," though I have yet to find a historical reference to it.) The official biographers tell us that John Greenleaf Whittier was "Greenleaf," and Matthew Franklin Whittier was "Franklin" or sometimes "Frank." I, however, feel that these were used more as nicknames than actual "substitute" first names. Although we see them used in correspondence and in all the historical accounts, I don't feel comfortable using them this way. It doesn't entirely ring true to me. I feel that Matthew didn't *like* "Franklin," and still less, "Frank," and he didn't like being ruled by superstition or mindless convention. I feel that as soon as he got into the world he began using "Matthew," but when he would relate to the family, he suffered them to call him "Franklin" as a formality. Likewise, he may have acquiesced to calling his brother "Greenleaf," because his brother wanted to abide by the old Quaker ways. I am just going by my gut feelings--but I refuse to write an entire book using a convention that feels unnatural to me. So where I refer to John Greenleaf Whittier, I will use "John Greenleaf" (because "John" doesn't feel right, either); and where I refer to Matthew Franklin Whittier, I will call him "Matthew," as I feel he preferred to be called.

I will *not* be referring to "Whittier, the poet." And I most certainly will not be referring to "Matthew Franklin Whittier, brother of the poet."

Now for my story.

Even in grade school, I always felt that I had *some* connection to the Romantic poets and writers. Perhaps my role was not a major one, but I felt I was *there.* Additionally, each Christmas when I saw one version or another of "A Christmas Carol," I always had, deep down, the inexplicable
feeling that I had originated it; I was responsible for it. I knew full-well I couldn't possibly have been, since it was written by Charles Dickens; and yet, that feeling persisted (more on this later).

When, as an adult, I produced an independent film about reincarnation, and was interviewed about it in approximately year 2000 (long before I learned of Matthew Franklin Whittier), I was asked if I remembered any of my past lives. I replied, "I do think that several of my past lives have been very influential in my work. I have, through intuition, glimpses, and educated guesswork, identified a few lives I feel pretty sure of, and a number of others I have hints of. I've been a writer, connected, I think, with the Romantic poets, for example. Not any of the famous ones as near as I can tell, but I think I knew some of them personally and ascribed to their overall philosophy (for better or worse)."

Remember this when we get to how I first encountered Matthew, which was not influenced in any way by this hunch. It was entirely coincidental. I barely knew of John Greenleaf Whittier, and I certainly did not know he had a brother. I was not even searching for a man in the 19th century--I was, in fact, searching for a woman in the 20th century, and it happened this way.

Some years earlier I had had a psychic reading in which I was told about a more recent past life as a woman writer on the West Coast, who had some success publishing serials. For this reason, I would occasionally poke around the internet looking for names of female writers from the 1920's and 30's, whose names seemed familiar. I would find names that rang a bell very faintly--or maybe they didn't. It was all too nebulous to be sure. Then, I hit upon one I felt absolutely certain I recognized--Sarah Orne Jewett. I didn't recall ever having heard of her before, and so far as I can remember, I never studied her in school. But in any case, this woman was from the wrong era, and she was on the wrong coast. She was, in fact, one of the New England Romantic writers--something I didn't know when I felt I recognized her name.

I read one of her stories, and it seemed familiar, as though I'd written it myself--but looking at her photographs and photographs of her rather large home, I had no feeling of having been her. The whole thing made no sense to me, so after some time I sent the website URL (for the Sarah Orne Jewett Text Project) to my friend Jeff Keene. Jeff's past-life proof case was featured in my documentary, and I had had a number of synchronistic experiences with him. These incidences were, in fact, so unbelievable that I stopped sending out my press release "anecdotes" page, where I cited them, because I concluded that people I sent it to probably assumed I was making it up.10

I wrote Jeff, "I feel like I'm close." About half an hour later, Jeff sent back a URL from a section of the Sarah Orne Jewett Text Project website entitled "Portraits," which is not shown the front page, but is instead accessed through the section marked "Full Texts." It contains a list of the people in her social circle along with their images. Poet John Greenleaf Whittier was there, along with many other notables from the period like James Russell Lowell, Oliver Wendell Holmes and Harriet Beecher Stowe. At the very bottom of the list is an engraving taken from a photograph of Matthew Franklin Whittier, probably in his late 40's. Jeff had sent me the direct link to his image, writing:

As if guided, I went right to "Main Contents" [sic] then to "Portraits" then to the very bottom name "Matthew Franklin Whittier" clicked on it and said BINGO! Looked at the picture and said to myself, "he looks a bit like Steve." Sent along a
file. The paragraph below the picture was the only thing I could come up with in a Google search. When I read that I said, "sounds like Steve In Another Life." By the way, I checked all the other people listed in "Portraits" but saw no likeness of you in any of them. Sense of humor, writer and anti-slavery, yup, if you're in this group I would put my money on Matthew.

And indeed he did look like me--about an 85% similarity, which is what I've come to expect in past-life matches. But it was the eyes--the far-away look, the sadness with just a hint of fire. I can't explain it. If it happens to you, you'll know what I mean. I knew I was looking at myself some 160 years ago; and yet, it felt like yesterday. I knew he was wearing a "great coat," though I didn't remember where I'd heard the term. I knew the sadness in his eyes. I just knew.

From then until today, with the help of a volunteer researcher who I met online, and who coincidentally lives in the Haverhill area where Matthew grew up, I have attempted to record and date any and all impressions about him, while the research has gone forward. I recorded the dates on which I had feelings or memories; and the dates when I responded to images, names or written records from the period. I have thus learned as much about this man as one can get from the recorded history; but I still know more than I should. As said, my concrete memories are few; but my emotional memories are near-complete. I know how he felt, and how he thought. I have the same talents. I have the same sense of humor. I have the same intelligence. I have the same character (for better or worse). And I have the same "edge," though I learned as a young man to tone it down a bit so as not to hurt people’s feelings. I tell it like I see it, just as I did then. It gets me just about as far today as it got me then. I don't care. I will continue telling the truth wherever it leads.

As I told my researcher during the course of writing this book, the research on Matthew Franklin Whittier has been like buying a 5,000 piece jigsaw puzzle, and on the box lid is a photograph of a tropical island, complete with gently waving palm trees and a magnificent sunset splashed across the sky, hanging over a gentle, turquoise sea. But when you put enough of the pieces
together, you realize that the photograph you actually have depicts a storm, with fierce churning clouds and a stinging wind whipping the palm fronds furiously back and forth.

I can't help the picture that emerged. This is what was in the box.

Matthew Franklin Whittier was a humorist of some renown. If I were presented with a case purporting to be a reincarnated humorist, my first question would be, "Is he funny?" I could take time trying to think up a quip, but it doesn't work that way. I have no wish to be a stand-up comic, forcing people to laugh under pressure. I would actually go so far as to say that Matthew's writing was likewise intensely funny when it was spontaneous and inspired, but that it could be tedious when it wasn't. Matthew was a kind of philosopher-comic; his humor emerged from his deep understanding of life. When he saw deeply into life, and something about it amused him, his humor erupted quite naturally. But when he wrote under pressure of fame or finances, I would say he was merely imitating himself.

I am the same way. I have a reputation among friends and acquaintances for being funny--but I am not the sort of person one would call upon to emcee programs. My sense of humor is sharp enough in the radio interviews I've done, and on my website, "In Another Life." But it's uncomfortable to talk about such things. As Matthew's brother described him, he "...was never forth-putting on his own account."12 I have always been the same way. My website and radio interviews are available as of this writing, and you can judge this question for yourself.

I know, as Matthew reincarnated, what humor he would especially appreciate today, and why: some (not all) of the articles on TheOnion.com; Gary Larson's "Far Side" cartoons; and the British comedian "Mr. Bean." If pressed for a commonality, I would say that all of these look deeply into life and "tell it like it is." TheOnion uses fictional reports to expose what's actually going on beneath society's facade, as in their classic response to the 9/11 attack, "Hijackers Surprised to Find Themselves in Hell."13 Larson uses black humor to delve into the psychology of human nature, as with the gifted child who pushes the door that is clearly marked "Pull"; or the deer with the bulls eye on his chest, whose companions remark, "Bummer of a birthmark, Hal." Mr. Bean is the nine-year-old boy (or girl) in all of us, what psychologist Eric Berne called the "little professor." This is insightful humor; and Matthew's humor was, above all, insightful humor.

If I am Matthew reincarnated, I should have his writing ability, and I should write in his style. I should not only be imitating his style after having discovered him--I should have public, documented proof that I was writing as well as he wrote, and in his style, before learning of him.

Pretty tall order, isn't it? As it happens, I do have such evidence. In 1998, while still working on my documentary, "In Another Life," I created a page on the supporting website which gave a humorous report on a recent filming trip to Pennsylvania and Maryland. The style is reminiscent of Matthew's, inasmuch as it takes a foolish person through a trip up north (in an area where Matthew probably traveled), and has him misunderstanding and misinterpreting things in a humorous way. That page, which I called "The Lighter Side," is reproduced in the Appendix.

My first mention of having discovered Matthew on the internet was June 6, 2005, shortly after it happened. My first reading of Lloyd W. Griffin's thesis about Matthew was on October 18, 2005. On August 2, 2006, while promoting "In Another Life" with individualized e-mails to university
professors, I wrote an "Update" (my online blog, named before the word "blog" came into general usage), describing my efforts and commenting on the state of academia as regards disbelief in the paranormal, in general. It's gained a certain amount of attention in its own right, and periodically rises to a rank high in my website stats for number of visits, as I write this book, today, in 2011. I had read a handful of Matthew's "Ethan Spike" sketches--those that were appended to Griffin's thesis--but I was certainly not making a conscious effort to copy his style. I was simply doing what came naturally to me.

In that Update, I give the kind of example that a minister might give to open his sermon, and then I remark:

Of course, I have to have a point with this. I'm really a frustrated minister, you know, and with nobody to preach sermons to, I have to write these updates.

Compare with Matthew's letter written to his brother, John Greenleaf, in 1857, obtained after I wrote the above:

Spiritualism continues on the increase in this city. .... I have preached 4 "sarmints" this winter. Once from the text "there are more things in Heaven & Earth--Horatio--than your philosophy has dreamed of" and at another time my text was "What good will it do? Will it pay?"

The odds of my having this degree of writing talent (i.e. without having worked for it), and having a similar humorous style as a historical figure I came across the way I came across Matthew, are slim. Note also the similarity in content--in both cases, for example, Matthew and I are promoting Spiritualist or esoteric concepts.

It also means that this entire book is a kind of "meta-proof" in its own right. Nobody but Matthew, reincarnated, could have written this book. You will understand this better as you get further into it, and see how deeply I understand his personal psychology and emotions, despite the fact that his personal style was to conceal them, and despite the misleading myth that has grown up around the Whittier legacy.

There is a great complexity of detail in this narrative, made more so because I am telling two stories at once--Matthew Franklin Whittier's (both historical and intuited versions); and the story of the research itself. Each story has its own chronology, and they are interwoven. In order to keep all this straight, it may be helpful for the reader to refer as necessary to the two time-lines I've placed at the beginning of the Appendix--one for Matthew, and one for the research.

A final aside, which I feel I must mention despite the fact that I've claimed not to be "forth-putting." The reader should know, as I present this seemingly improbable tale, that I have been practicing strict honesty since 1973, when I was 20 years old (I am 57 as I write this chapter). In all that time, if I've told a lie on very rare occasions, it's been the sort of lie where you try to keep from hurting someone's feelings (as in, "Does this dress make me look fat?") or when a form asks a question it has no business asking. As far as this account is concerned, I may at times have inadvertently jumped to unwarranted conclusions while interpreting the history--my researcher has several times caught me out on such extravagances, and a knowledgeable critic, reading this book, may catch me out on more--but there is no deliberate fabrication in it whatsoever.
Put that in your pipe and smoke it.\(^{14}\)

Sincerely,
Stephen Sakellarios

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Footnotes

1) "The Reincarnation of James, the Submarine Man," by Rick Brown, 1989

2) Actually I employed three, but the third was proved fraudulent. I promised her that if she refunded my money I wouldn't take further action, and since she did I will honor my agreement and not risk exposing her by relating details of the story.

3) "Diary of Elizabeth Hussey Whittier," 1836-1838, pp. 6-7

4) "Whitter-land: a Handbook of North Essex," Samuel T. Pickard, April, 1904, pp. 102-103


6) "Life and Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier" by Samuel T. Pickard, 1894, p. 33-34


9) There is some evidence for this, inasmuch as Matthew's wife, Abby, refers to him as "Franklin" in a letter written two months after their marriage to his sister, Elizabeth, perhaps because that's how he was addressed in his family. But if anybody was calling him the more familiar "Frank" it should have been his new wife, unless, as I feel, he objected to it.

10) See Appendix

11) Strangely, I found what is arguably an even closer physical match with a man of the same era, Nathaniel Cobb Deering (no relation to Matthew's admirer, Nathaniel Deering), but I do not sense that the soul inside the eyes of this man's portrait is mine, the way I do with the portrait of Matthew, nor does his personal history or traits even remotely match mine as Matthew's does point-for-point. However, he was a member of the House of Representatives from Penobscot County, Maine in 1855 and 1856, a mere 130 miles from Portland, where Matthew lived at the time. Since Matthew kept abreast of politics, he certainly would have been aware of him. From my studies, I hold it possible that either great admiration, or great dislike, can create such a strong impression on the mind that it can influence one's appearance in a subsequent incarnation. I have a hunch that Matthew may have disliked this man so intensely that I have ended up more-or-less with the imprint of his face on my own in this lifetime, which would account for why I have never liked my features in this life. My subjective experience is that I not only dislike the way I look in the mirror, but feel it actually isn't me--but that when I first saw Matthew's image, I felt, "Now, that's how I'm supposed to look!" If this theory is correct, we should someday find a letter penned by Matthew expressing his strong dislike for this man.

13) TheOnion.com, Sept. 26, 2001, Issue 37.34

14) I did not know that Matthew also used this phrase until after I finished this chapter, and turned to transcribing his works. In "Spanks: A Tail," (Portland "Transcript," May 12, 1860), Matthew writes: "The Supreme Court is respectfully requested to put this fack in its pipe and smoke it."