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Sources of Hawthorne's "Sir William Pepperell"

by ROBERT C. GRAYSON

IN THE FALL of 1832, Hawthorne's "Sir William Pepperell," a sketch of the hero who led New England to the conquest of Louisburg on Cape Breton, was published in Samuel Goodrich's *The Token* (dated 1833). In this, the fourth of his sketches of famous historical figures ("Mrs. Hutchinson," "Dr. Bullivant," and "Sir William Phips" were published during 1830-31 in the *Salem Gazette*), Hawthorne used several sources whose facts he combined in a way that shows he had gained the skill of using another's data without quoting or plagiarizing years before he became editor of Goodrich's *Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge* (1836). Indeed, Goodrich's acquaintance with Hawthorne's skill in the Pepperell sketch may be one reason he later offered Hawthorne the editorship.

Featuring two panoramic scenes—an expeditionary force preparing to sail from Boston Harbor, and its triumphal entry into Louisburg—"Sir William Pepperell" characterizes four main figures and four minor ones. The minor characters are so vividly drawn that they seem brilliantly realized fictional creations; yet the bulk of the material—including all these figures—came from historical sources, principally the *History of New Hampshire* by Jeremy Belknap, a founder of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

In the first paragraph Hawthorne cites Pepperell's letters for certain estimates he makes of the merchant-general's character. Because of the position of that citation, readers might assume that the letters are the principal source of the sketch. Hawthorne, it is true, had access to a number of letters written by Pepperell (and some letters written to him) in Volume I of *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*. But these letters contain little of the data Hawthorne uses in "Sir William Pepperell."

As stated, the chief source is Jeremy Belknap's *History of New Hampshire*. Belknap's account of the siege of Louisburg supplied Hawthorne much material not available in other sources. Hawthorne follows Belknap's account very closely, though he sometimes states facts more positively. For example, while Belknap somewhat doubtfully attributes the initiation of New England's plan to invade Cape Breton to William Vaughan, Hawthorne more confidently asserts: Vaughan "conceived

the idea of reducing” Louisburg. Perhaps his confidence stems from a sketch in Farmer and Moore’s *Collections* which states: “There can be no doubt that Colonel William Vaughan was the person, who first suggested, that the fortress at Louisbourg might be captured, either by surprise, or a regular siege.”¹ Both Belknap and Hawthorne relate that Governor Shirley, impressed by Vaughan’s idea of a surprise attack, pledged both houses of the Great and General Court to secrecy before he divulged the plan to them. Then Belknap says: “The secret was kept for some days; till an honest member, who performed the family devotion at his lodging, inadvertently discovered it by praying for a blessing on the attempt.”² More memorably and less deferentially Hawthorne says the vow was violated “by the pious perjury of a country member of the lower house.”³ Both stress that Pepperrell’s qualifications to head the expeditionary force were not military, but were based on his popularity and wide acquaintance (as a merchant) in Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts. As Belknap puts it: “It was necessary that the men should know and love their general, or they would not enlist under him.”⁴ Both mention Pepperrell’s appealing to George Whitefield for advice whether to lead the expedition, the ambiguous nature of Whitefield’s reply, “dark as those of Delphos” (Hawthorne), Whitefield’s supplying a motto (*Nil desperandum Christo duce*) which “gave the expedition the air of a crusade.”⁵

With artistry both writers seize upon a set of minor characters who illustrate the diverse traits of New England. First in the presentation of both authors is a preacher, a chaplain, whom Hawthorne calls “a dark enthusiast . . . of the new sect [Methodist].” He carries upon his shoulder an axe (Belknap says “a hatchet”) to destroy the images in the French churches.⁶ Another vivid minor character, an alchemist, offers General Pepperrell his design for a “flying bridge” (both authors use that term) by which the soldiers could quickly scale the forty-foot-high walls of Louisburg (Belknap describes the invention; Hawthorne does not).⁷

But Hawthorne made some variations in the list of minor characters provided by Belknap. Up to this point he followed the order of the historian, but then he transferred one character from Belknap’s list to the second of his panoramic scenes—that in which the victorious New

1. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Complete Writings of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, Old Manse Edition, XVII (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1900), 236; Jeremy Belknap, *History of New Hampshire, The Sources of Science*, No. 88 (1812, rpt. New York: Johnson Reprint, 1970), I, 269; “Biographical Sketches,” *Collections, Topographical, Historical, and Biographical, Relating Principally to New Hampshire*, II (1823), 161. According to Marian L. Kesselring, *Hawthorne’s Reading, 1828–1850* (New York: New York Public Library, 1949), p. 50, Hawthorne withdrew Volume II of *Collections* from the Salem Athenaeum on 4 Dec. 1827.

2. Belknap, I, 270.

3. Hawthorne, XVII, 25.

4. Belknap, I, 271. Cf. Hawthorne, XVII, 24.

5. Belknap, I, 272. Cf. Hawthorne, XVII, 25.

6. Belknap; Hawthorne, XVII, 29.

7. Belknap, I, 274; Hawthorne, XVII, 28–29.

Englanders march into Louisburg. This man Hawthorne depicts vividly:

Pressing forward to the portal, sword in hand, comes a comical figure in a brown suit, and blue yarn stockings, with a huge frill sticking forth from his bosom, to which the whole man seems an appendage: this is that famous worthy of Plymouth County, who went to the war with two plain shirts and a ruffled one, and is now about to solicit the post of governor of Louisbourg.⁸

More prosaically, according to Belknap, an officer was overheard saying that he was carrying two brown shirts and a frilly one because he expected to be made governor of Louisburg.⁹ In contrast, Hawthorne made the character spring to life at the dramatic moment when the army entered the vanquished fortress. Hawthorne also modifies Belknap's presentation of "an ingenious and benevolent clergyman," who proposed a plan for the encampment and trenches and a method for detecting mines the French might try to dig under the besieging forces. In Hawthorne's "Sir William Pepperell," he is more simply an inland clergyman "looking like Peace" who proposes an unspecified way of taking the fortress without bloodshed.¹⁰ This simple preacher foreshadows the anti-war ideas Hawthorne presents near the end of his sketch.

Several things common to Belknap and Hawthorne, Hawthorne treats differently from the historian. For example, Hawthorne presents Governor Shirley's detailed plan for a surprise attack on Louisburg as his parting advice to the general, transferring it from two of Shirley's letters (one to Governor Wentworth of New Hampshire, the other to Pepperell). Without presenting any details, Hawthorne merely says: "He [Shirley] is now impressing on the general's recollection the voluminous details of a plan for surprising Louisbourg in the depth of midnight, and thus to finish the campaign within twelve hours after the arrival of the troops."¹¹ Again, while the historian comments on New England's universal zeal for the campaign, Hawthorne proceeds to contrast that with the absence of any one unifying force in his time.¹²

One of the major differences between the accounts of the two authors is that Belknap fills a number of pages with the siege itself, but Hawthorne allots it only one paragraph.¹³ This difference results from Hawthorne focusing the reader's attention on only two scenes—the embarkation of the expeditionary force and the triumphal entry into the fortified city. This limited focus produces some other specific changes. Hawthorne reduces Belknap's detailed record of some of the arduous work

8. Hawthorne, XVII, 33.

9. Belknap, I, 273.

10. Hawthorne, XVII, 239; Belknap, I, 273.

11. Hawthorne. See also Belknap, I, 264; and William Shirley, letter to William Pepperrell, March 19, 1744-45, in *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, I (1792; rpt. New York: Johnson Reprint, 1968), 5-11. Hawthorne withdrew this volume from the Salem Athenaeum on 12 Oct. 1827 and 12 April 1830 (Kesselring, p. 56).

12. Hawthorne, XVII, 237; Belknap, I, 272.

13. Hawthorne, XVII, 241-42; Belknap, I, 275-79.

and valor of the besieging army to mere statement. With equal brevity, he reports that "with few intermissions, the besieging army [when not in action] made the siege one long day of frolic and disorder." On the other hand, Belknap lists specific games the soldiers played, and mentions that a record of the courts-martial filled 260 folio pages.¹⁴ Moreover, while the historian details the energetic and efficient role William Vaughan played in the siege, Hawthorne only implies that activity by contrasting the energetic man at the embarkation with the "Vaughan worn down with toil and exposure" who enters Louisburg.¹⁵

Another major difference between the two accounts is that Hawthorne's style is more pictorial than Belknap's. Thus, Hawthorne pictures in words both Boston Harbor on the day the expeditionary force embarked and Louisburg on the day the army entered it. Hawthorne had, of course, seen Boston Harbor as it was in his day and no doubt had seen maps and pictures of it as it existed in earlier times. From these experiences, he imagined its appearance, filled with New England's sailing vessels, in March 1746. He depicts Louisburg in harmony with what Belknap reports, but more graphically. Hawthorne probably based his vivid word-portraits of General Pepperrell, especially, and Governor Shirley on portraits of the two men. The governor is a "middle-aged gentleman . . . in silk, gold, and velvet, and with a pair of spectacles thrust above his forehead." However, Hudson's portrait of Shirley—a print of it adorns the frontispiece of Volume II of *The Memorial History of Boston*, edited by Justin Winsor—does not show him wearing glasses. Sir William Pepperrell is "a well-proportioned man, with a slight hoar-frost of age" dressed in "a scarlet British uniform"; and "in the left pocket of a large buff waistcoat, near the pommel of his sword, we see the square protuberance of a small Bible. . . ."¹⁶ In Hawthorne's day a full-length portrait of Pepperrell, done by John Smibert, was already in the Essex Institute in Salem.¹⁷ In *Grandfather's Chair*, Hawthorne mentions having seen the portrait.¹⁸ (Hawthorne's portrayal of Louisburg may also have drawn on the sketch of Louisburg in the background of Pepperrell's portrait.)

Other data common to the *History of New Hampshire* and Hawthorne's "Sir William Pepperrell," as well as other historical sources Hawthorne consulted, are these: Because Louisburg was so well fortified, it was called "the Dunkirk of America"; New England attributed

14. Hawthorne, XVII, 241; Belknap, I, 278.

15. Hawthorne, XVII, 243; Belknap, I, 277-78.

16. Hawthorne, XVII, 238. Hawthorne's word-picture of Shirley is also on this page. In addition to Hudson's portrait of Shirley, there was also "a curious print of his Excellency, done in mezzo tint," issued by John Pelham in 1747, according to *The Memorial History of Boston, 1630-1880*, ed. Justin Winsor (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1881), II, 62n.

17. Henry Wilder Foote, *John Smibert, Painter* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1950), p. 179, identifies the painter as John Smibert, and states that George A. Ward presented it to the Essex Institute in 1821, having transported it from Kittery, Maine, atop a stage coach.

18. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, VI (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1972), 118.

its victory to Providence; Commodore Warren, commander of the British fleet that joined in the siege, was "greedy of fame" and stole glory due the Americans; and the English government rewarded the principal leaders of the expedition—Shirley, Pepperrell, and Warren—except Vaughan.¹⁹

Facts not found in Belknap's history Hawthorne generally attributes to the specific source from which they come. He cites "Dr. [William] Douglass, a shrewd Scotch physician of the last century, who died before the war had gathered in half its harvest" for the computation "that many thousand blooming damsels, capable and well-inclined to serve the state as wives and mothers, were compelled to live lives of barren celibacy by the consequences of the successful siege of Louisbourg."²⁰ Also, like Douglass, Hawthorne can find little in the victory to glory in: "We . . . if we . . . confine our view to a period short of the Revolution, might doubt whether the victory was granted to our fathers as a blessing or a judgment."²¹ Hawthorne's comments, however, indict all wars, not just this one. This anti-war stance must be considered the one important ingredient Hawthorne added to what his New England sources supplied.

Remarkable as the anti-war sentiment is in a sketch praising a pre-Revolutionary American war hero, Hawthorne may have been emboldened to add it by Voltaire's "A Funeral Eulogium on the Officers Who Died in the War of 1741." While praising French officers who sacrificed their finances and their lives in the war, Voltaire roundly condemns war itself and the moral and religious leaders who fail to denounce "this crime, which is so great and universal."²² Hawthorne's specific arguments are similar to some of Voltaire's. Both men denounce its slaughter, its impairment of the health of many, the moral diseases it breeds in men. According to Hawthorne, "the flower of the youth were cut down by the sword, or died of physical diseases, or became unprofitable citizens by moral ones contracted in the camp and

19. Hawthorne, XVII, 237, 241, 243, 244-45; Belknap, I, 268, 279, 280-81. Concerning the Puritans' belief that Providence gave them the victory, see "Letters Relating to the Expedition Against Cape Breton," *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, I, 47, 49, 51, 52; "Sir William Pepperell," *Collections, Topographical, Historical, and Biographical, Relating Principally to New Hampshire*, III (1824), 86; Thomas Hutchinson, *The History of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts*, ed. Lawrence Shaw Mayo (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1936), II, 321. From the Salem Athenaeum, Hawthorne withdrew *MHSC*, Vol. I, on 12 Oct. 1827 and on 12 April 1830; *Collections*, Vol. III, on 5 Dec. 1827 and on 24 April 1829. Although there is no record of his ever withdrawing Hutchinson's *History*, Vol. II, he makes accurate references to it in the first paragraph of "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," published in *The Token* for 1832 (Kesselring, pp. 56, 50).

20. Hawthorne, XVII, 242. Cf. William Douglass, *A Summary, Historical and Political of the First Planting, Progressive Improvements and Present State of the British Settlements in North America* (London: R. Baldwin, 1755), p. 510. Hawthorne checked this volume out of the Salem Athenaeum on 11 Febr. 1828 (Kesselring, p. 49).

21. Hawthorne, XVII, 240.

22. *The Works of Voltaire*, tr. and ed. T. Smollett, T. Franklin, et al. (London: Printed for W. Johnson, et al., 1770), XVI, 135. Between 2 Oct. 1829 and 1 Sept. 1831, Hawthorne borrowed forty-nine of the ninety-two volumes of Voltaire's *Oeuvres Complete* (Kehl, 1755-89) from the Salem Athenaeum (Kesselring, p. 69).

field."²³ Hawthorne's phraseology resembles Voltaire's: "Thus perished by a violent death, and in the flower of their age, a number of men, from whom their country expected to derive the greatest glory and advantage. . . ." War, he said, "transforms into beasts of prey men who were born to live like brothers"; and soldiers, "in the excesses of drunkenness and brutal debauchery . . . are the dregs of nations."²⁴ In addition, Hawthorne pointed out that New England's victory at Louisbourg whetted the "instinctive appetite for war," creating a "lust for glory" which England and France "gratified [in the French and Indian War] . . . with slaughter."²⁵

Voltaire's "Eulogium" seems the more likely to be the source of Hawthorne's animadversions on war, since shortly afterwards he cites Voltaire's estimate of New England's contributions to the War of 1741. "The English, with very pardonable vanity," Hawthorne wrote,

attributed the conquest chiefly to the valor of the [English] naval forces [commanded by Sir Peter Warren]. On the continent of Europe our fathers met with greater justice, and Voltaire has ranked this enterprise of the husbandmen of New England among the most remarkable events in the reign of Louis XV.²⁶

The passage to which Hawthorne refers is apparently this:

Une entreprise qui montre de quoi est capable une nation commerçante à la fois de guerrière, est la siège de Louisbourg. Ce ne fut point une operation du cabinet de ministres de Londres; ce fut le fruit de la hardiesse des marchands de la Nouvelle-Angleterre."²⁷

The Frenchman's judgment gives an air of authority to Hawthorne's own and removes the possibility that the high estimate of New England's role in the victory could be mere chauvinism.

This study of the sources of "Sir William Pepperell" indicates that Hawthorne researched his subject, gathering material from varied sources; but he relied most heavily on the most detailed and most authentic account available to him, Jeremy Belknap's *History of New Hampshire*, just as he relied on C. H. Snow's *History of Boston* to supply authentic background for "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" and *The Scarlet Letter*.²⁸ Since Hawthorne never withdrew Belknap's *History* from the Salem Athenaeum, it is possible that he owned a copy. At any rate, his extensive use of the book here increases the likelihood he consulted it in preparation for writing such works as "Roger Malvin's Burial"²⁹ and "The Gray Champion." Furthermore, the skills

23. Hawthorne, XVII, 242.

24. Voltaire, XVI, 149, 135, 137.

25. Hawthorne, XVII, 240, 241.

26. Hawthorne, XVII, 244.

27. François Marie Arouet de Voltaire, *Histoire de la guerre de 1741*, editions de J. Maurens (Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1971), p. 281.

28. See my "The New England Sources of 'My Kinsman, Major Molineux,'" in the Dec. 1982 issue of *American Literature*; and Charles Ryskamp, "The New England Sources of *The Scarlet Letter*," *American Literature*, XXXI (1959), 257.

29. Robert J. Daly, "History and Chivalric Myth in 'Roger Malvin's Burial,'" *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, CIX (1973), 105.

Hawthorne exhibits in the Pepperrell sketch of adapting material to his purpose, gathering data from various sources, summarizing, and paraphrasing served him well as editor of *The Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge* and as children's historian in *Grandfather's Chair*.

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