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## AMERICAN COLONIAL PORTRAITURE IN THE CANADIAN SCENE

IN EARLY CANADIAN PORTRAITURE, Colonial America may have played a larger part than has been generally recognized. The evidence, while circumstantial and fragmentary, is substantial. New England in the eighteenth century had attained a cultural identity in which artists had a role. John Singleton Copley, the Tory portraitist and most important of the colonial painters, was the idol of the more substantial Massachusetts citizenry. They, as well as Nova Scotian and Quebec gentry, clamoured constantly at his door to have their portraits painted. In 1769, at the age of thirty-two, Copley married Mr. Richard Clarke's daughter. Clarke was the wealthy Boston merchant who provided unwittingly the tea bales for a certain famous tea party. This was an early incident in a chain, the end results being that many cultured Loyalists found themselves transplanted to Canadian soil. They took with them a way of life in which portraiture had a place, but economic conditions prevented its immediate indulgence in the new setting. The following details support these generalizations.

Nova Scotia in the 1700's had many close connections with New England. Boston men took an active part in affairs at the Port Royal and Canso settlements. American colonists organized and executed the 1745 capture of Louisbourg and, incidentally, one artist at least went with them to record the event. Halifax, which was founded in 1749, numbered many former New Englanders among its populace. Extensive American migrations to the Saint John River and other points took place after 1760, and there was a steady trade to Boston and adjoining ports; the eastern seaboard of Canada briefly took on the semblance of a fourteenth colony. By virtue of its more isolated position, Newfoundland was scarcely affected by its colonial neighbours. British-speaking Quebec and Montreal after the fall of French power were also less subject to American influence, since those centres were dominated for the first years by the military.

Colonial American painting was part of this American colonial influence in eastern Canada before the Revolution. As early as 1756, when Copley was a nineteen-year-old prodigy, he was accepting portrait commissions from Nova Scotians. Copley's first recorded Nova Scotia patron was the Honourable Jonathan Belcher, Chief Justice of the Province from 1754 to 1776. The Judge had been born in New England of English parentage and was a Harvard graduate. One historian has declared that he was, "a man of excellent habits, prudent, upright, and of great political integrity. His prejudices were much in favour of New England." Others were much less complimentary to his abilities. In 1756 he went to Boston, where he married Abigail Allen in spite of the fact that his father had visions of better things for him. We are told that when Belcher was a young man at school in London, the ambitious parent wrote to him "not to marry too soon but to marry well, to work hard, and to relax with his bass viol and flute". He waited until he was forty-six and chose a bride of twenty-seven. Belcher seized the opportunity of the wedding trip to Boston to have his portrait painted by Copley in his official robes, and one of his bride was done at the same time.

A second portrait commission is referred to in Copley's correspondence. Thomas Ainslie wrote to him from Halifax on October 8, 1757, that he had received his portrait with great satisfaction and added: "I believe you may find it worth your while to take a trip down here in the Spring, there are several people who would be glad to employ you. I believe so because I have heard it mentioned . . . ." After Wolfe's victory Ainslie assumed the lucrative position of Quebec customs collector, and the portrait was sent to his aged Scottish mother as a reminder of an absent son. Stark realism was the dominating characteristic of the painting, a quality then much admired. Ainslie wrote to Copley from his new post describing how his fifteen-month-old son was sent to Scotland for his upbringing, and quoting a letter the child's grandfather had written to Ainslie which told how "The infant eyed your Picture, he sprung to it, roard and scried, and attempted gripping the hand, but when he could not catch hold of it, nor gett you to speak to him, he stamp'd scolded, and when any of us askt him for Papa, he always turned and pointed to the Picture. What think you of this proof of the Painter's skill in taking your likeness." Ainslie then goes on to say, "Now, Sir, as I have ever had an inclination to do you a service if in my power, and the propagating of this circumstance, which I have taken care to do having not a little added to your fame here, and as I am of Opinion that a Jaunt into this Country would rather add to your Credite and fortune, than diminish it; if you will come here for two or three months in the summer, so as to

be here in June, I have a room in my house at Your Service, so that your stay will be no Expence to You, and not only my family, but all those of Credite in the town would be glad to employ you. Be not over-persuaded from coming . . . .” Copley replied with warmth at the proffered hospitality, but said: “I should receive a singular pleasure in excepting, if my Business was anyways slack, but it is so far otherwise that I have a large Room full of Pictures unfinished, which would engage me these twelve months, if I did not begin any others; this renders it impossible to leave the place I am in . . . .”

Captain Peter Traille was another Halifax friend of Copley. Evidently Traille, like Ainslie, had gone to Boston for portrait sittings. The painting had not been delivered by April, 1763, but the artist was instructed to draw on him for payment and to send the canvas when appropriate opportunity offered. Traille also advised a visit to Halifax during the summer season when he was sure Copley would pick up £100 to £200 in commissions. Two years later the Captain wrote again, thanking the artist for forwarding a couple of crayon portraits. These two works were for Traille, who had artistic aspirations and who intended to use them as models in teaching himself drawing and colouring. To the would-be artist's mortification, the ship on which they were coming was wrecked along the Nova Scotia coast; some Indians looted the cargo, and the only things saved from the parcel were a couple of prints. Traille wished that Copley was nearer so that he could be shown his errors by precept. He left Nova Scotia in 1767 on receiving a posting to Gibraltar and evidently never returned to Canada.

Various other Nova Scotians sought Copley's services. The Sigmund Samuel Collection in Toronto has on its walls undated portraits, attributed to Copley, of Michael Francklin and his wife. Francklin came to Nova Scotia from England in 1752, and was successively a member of the Assembly, and then a Legislative Councillor for two years from 1766 before becoming Indian Agent. The couple had gone evidently to Boston to have their portraits painted.

One painting contemplated by a Nova Scotian seems not to have been painted. In a letter dated at Boston in 1771 from Henry Pelham, himself an artist of no mean repute, to his half-brother, Copley, there is an interesting reference. This letter was written when Copley was working temporarily in New York. Pelham's postscript reads, “Everybody presents their compliments to you and beg you to come home as they want to have their Pictures done. Lord William Campbell, Governor of Nova Scotia, was at your room a few days ago, he says, he wonders that you bury yourself in this country and that he thinks you are the greatest Genius in the world.”

Three other pre-revolutionary Copley portraits of Nova Scotians are known. Benjamin Gerrish had been born in Boston but settled in Halifax before 1752. He prospered and kept in close touch with his natal city, visiting it often as, for example in 1765 when he arrived with his wife, his daughter, and a servant. His portrait dates about 1770, which is the same year as one was completed of his brother Joseph. Joseph Gerrish had been in Nova Scotia as early as 1745 when he was at Louisbourg, and later he settled permanently in Halifax and had many quarrels with Jonathan Belcher. Finally John Newton, the uncle of Gilbert Stuart Newton (the Nova Scotia-born artist and a relation by marriage to Gilbert Stuart) had his portrait painted in 1772. Newton came from Boston to be surveyor of His Majesty's Customs for Nova Scotia. His portrait remained in the province until the death of his daughter in 1856, when it was bequeathed to American relatives.

Copley left America in 1774 for Europe, where he spent the remainder of his life. His 1768 portrait of General Thomas Gage, the military governor in Montreal after the British conquest, seems to typify Copley's political leanings. He depicts Gage dressed in military uniform and pointing proudly to a distant thin straight line of disciplined British troops. The artist found even artistic matters in the Colonies distasteful. His step-brother, Henry Pelham, had had harsh words with Paul Revere, whom he accused of plagiarism. He said Revere had made an engraving from his painting of the Boston massacre without authorization or acknowledgment. Political and other events attendant on the birth of the new republic made the American soil no longer compatible to her greatest colonial artist. His wife joined him in England at a later date, sailing from Boston in the last vessel leaving the port under the British flag.

The new regime was hostile not only to Copley, but equally so to the great body of his patrons. Captions on his Colonial portraits read like lists of Loyalists leaving New England. Many went to the Maritimes and the Canadas in 1783. Others left for England, but later recrossed the Atlantic to settle in the British Provinces. Portraits of many of these Canadian Loyalist immigrants are still extant.

Nova Scotia received one group. The Reverend Mather Byles, Jr. and his wife, who went first to Halifax but later to Saint John, brought their portraits with them. That of this Boston divine had been painted by Copley, while his wife's is attributed to Henry Pelham. There is some confusion regarding another of Copley's subjects, Nathaniel Hurd; he seems to have come to Halifax, and two versions of his portrait by Copley remain in the United States. James Murray, who had been a customs official in Boston, and the Reverend William Walter, the former

Rector of Boston's Trinity Church and his wife, the former Lydia Lynde, were seemingly unable to bring their Copley portraits with them to Shelburne, Nova Scotia. The Walters returned to Massachusetts in 1792 and inherited the large Lynde estates at Salem. The portraits of the doughty old Nova Scotia Governor, Sir John Wentworth, and his personable wife whom Copley painted as a young woman with her pet squirrel, also remain south of the border. Lady Wentworth's portrait is one of Copley's most delightful works, revealing the charms of the lady who was Halifax hostess on innumerable occasions to the Duke of Kent. Her portrait was painted in New Hampshire during the lifetime of her first husband; ten days after his death in 1769 she laid aside her widow's weeds to marry Sir John. A third portrait of Miss Wentworth, Sir John's sister or niece, came to Nova Scotia and remained in the province until recent months.

New Brunswick received its quota as well. Aristocratic Dr. Paine from Worcester went to St. Andrews and became a prime mover in setting up a provincial academy; there is a Copley portrait of the doctor, and one of his quick-witted wife was limned during her childhood by Joseph Badger in 1757. Old Judge Sewell went to Saint John; Copley painted his portrait and in 1765 proposed making a mezzotint from it. The Sewells were highly educated people; two sons fostered dramatics and musical events in Saint John shortly after the city's founding and while it was still little more than a collection of shacks. One son, Jonathan Sewell, moved to Quebec, where he promoted cultural affairs throughout his long life. William Sandford Oliver, the holder of many official positions in New Brunswick, was the son of the Massachusetts Governor Thomas Oliver, whose miniature, said to be by Copley, still exists and who with his two brothers had been painted as a group by Smibert. One portrait came to New Brunswick with the Loyalists and still remains in the province. John Murray, the first sheriff of York County, had been for many years a member of the General Assembly for Rutland, Massachusetts. By reason of his Tory sympathies, he was forced to move first to Boston. There the mob ransacked his home; during the *melée* a bullet pierced the Copley portrait. The bullet hole can still be seen in the painting, which now has a permanent home in the New Brunswick Museum to which it was presented by the heirs of Sir Douglas Hazen.

Fewer of the artistic element of New England who had patronized the artists seem to have come to Upper Canada. Copley had, however, painted John Powell and his wife, and Benjamin Hallowell, the former Customs Collector in Boston. Hallowell's house was damaged by the irate mob, and his daughter lost

her mind as a result of certain indignities suffered on that occasion. The Hallowell portrait was probably the "fine painting" mentioned as left in the Boston house when the occupants were forced to flee.

The new arrivals in Canada experienced during 1783 all the deprivations of a people who were used to comfortable living and then suddenly catapulted into a virtual wilderness. Going briefly ashore at Saint John on the day of arrival, one woman found bears and other wild animals and what she thought was the roughest land she had ever seen. She returned to the ship, gathered her infant children around her, and shed tears. In such situations it was impossible to indulge in the refinements of life, even though many of the people had patronized artists in their old homes.

A word should be added regarding a most unusual portrait group that includes several Loyalists who went to the Eastern Townships of Quebec. This conversation piece of ten figures, by Henry Benbridge, and now in the National Gallery of Canada, was painted at Savannah, Georgia, about 1775. It depicts three Tannatt daughters, their mother and grandmother, two husbands, and other family connections, grouped casually in the garden of a southern mansion. The group includes Dr. Houstoun, collector of the hated stamp tax for which he was nearly lynched by the revolutionary mob, and James Hume, who was attorney-general of Georgia and later Chief Justice of East Florida. One would think that such a large and pretentious canvas (it measures more than three by five feet) might inspire Canadian artists to emulate Benbridge. However, the earliest ambitious Canadian conversation piece seems to be William von Moll Berczy's "Woolsey Family of Quebec City", dated 1809. Nothing in it indicates any relationship between the two paintings.

What were the results in Canadian art from these early contacts of her citizens with fine portraiture? Tangibly, they were probably not extensive. This is due, primarily, to the peculiar economic situation in which the Loyalists found themselves on their removal to Canada. The principal portrait painting in Canada during the eighteenth century was carried on in the French settlements by such artists as François Malepart de Beaucourt and Louis De Heer. They worked for the most part in the old-established French community. The French profile painter Saint Memin did work among the English of Quebec and Montreal, but he was something of an exception.

Most of the expatriate Americans still regarded their old homes as the fountainhead of cultural activity. Saint John had a miniaturist, William Beastalt, who

was registered as a City Freeman in 1797, but he was not nearly fashionable enough for society people. Ward Chipman, Chief Justice of New Brunswick, and his son, went to Boston in 1808 to have their portraits painted by Gilbert Stuart, the man who had been so bewitched by George Washington. Their actions are partially explained in that Ward Chipman's sister, Mrs. Gray, was the wife of a prominent Salem ship owner with whom "Chip", who had a gift for colourful letter writing, kept up an intimate correspondence. Of course Stuart's father had spent his later years as a Nova Scotian, but Gilbert was probably never inside the province; Chipman may have felt that, with this Nova Scotia connection, he was not entirely disloyal. Chipman Senior's merry face in the Stuart portrait points up the artist's ability to draw from his sitters their natural selves. He was a great raconteur and put his subjects at ease with a remarkable gift for anecdote that must have been reciprocated by Chipman. Sir George Prevost, Governor of Halifax after 1808, and William Dummer Powell, Chief Justice of Upper Canada and son of John Powell, also had their portraits painted by Stuart at about the same time.

Even the first substantial portraitist of Eastern Canada, Robert Field, had American connections. He painted the features of Halifaxians for a ten-year period after he had moved to Nova Scotia from the United States in 1808. Although he had been brought up in England, Field spent many years in Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore and had painted Thomas Jefferson and Martha Washington on a number of occasions. J. P. Drake, another English portraitist, had also been in the United States but did a good business throughout Canada in 1818 and 1820. Albert Gallatin Hoit came to Saint John and Halifax from Boston in 1840 and, like many lesser miniaturists, silhouette cutters, and poorly endowed limners, did an excellent business. Some were visiting Englishmen, others were Americans, a few were native-born Canadians, but all were kept busy. Men like these painted the still living old Loyalists such as Sampson Salter Blowers of Halifax and John Ward of Saint John. They recorded in addition the features of many sons and daughters of the Loyalists.

Readiness in the earlier years of the nineteenth century to have one's portrait commissioned for hanging on the parlour wall was no doubt in part a seal which symbolized a sense of well-being. Yet one suspects that the quick re-establishment of the art of portraiture when prosperity returned to these people goes farther; it was also due in part to the sympathetic attitude imported with the American emigrants. That intangible thing is probably New England's greatest contribution to the origins of Canadian painting.