

Fernald Point, the probable site of the Saint Sauveur settlement, as seen from Flying Mountain. From the Western Way (to the right in photo), "the English ship came on swifter than an arrow." *Photo by Bob Thayer*

The Histories of Saint Sauveur

Tim Garrity

Introduction

A visitor to the site of the Saint Sauveur settlement on Mount Desert Island in Maine will find a place of placid beauty, with no hint of the violent collision of European empires that took place there in the summer of 1613. Here, almost four hundred years ago, a settlement of French Jesuit missionaries was attacked by an English war party dispatched from the Virginia plantation. Hikers atop Acadia's mountains can look down on Somes Sound and supply with their imaginations the route of the attack and the scene that unfolded. Most historians agree that the location of the Saint Sauveur settlement was at a place that modern maps call Fernald Point, where a sloping meadow lies between the gravel beach on the western shore of Somes Sound and the steep cliffs of Flying Mountain. Early in the twentieth century, the fathers of Acadia National Park changed the name of nearby Dog Mountain to Saint Sauveur, a place name to mark the historic events that occurred nearby.¹

The Saint Sauveur settlement was founded in the summer of 1613 but lasted only a few weeks. The outpost was destroyed in a raid by Captain Samuel Argall, sailing the ship *Treasurer*, and acting on commission from the English settlement in Jamestown, Virginia. The violent action that drove the French from Mount Desert marked the beginning of one and one-half centuries of conflict—a state of enduring hostility between Britain and France that prevented the permanent settlement of the island until 1761.

There is not a single history of Saint Sauveur; there are many. Though the events of Saint Sauveur occurred only once, their telling is dynamic. New historians are impelled by new motives, see the world through contemporary eyes, and speak to new audiences. Each new version emphasizes some facts and ignores others, adds new information or modifies what was previously reported. Though the historian seeks to discover the past and describe it accurately, no one can escape the bias of present time and place. The histories of Saint Sauveur tell us not only of Mount Desert in 1613, but also the world of each historian along the way.

Unavoidably, this writer has his own intentional and unintentional

biases, beginning with the list of histories to be considered. These are a handful of the most important works and include samples from the seventeenth through twenty-first centuries. The table below shows the years of publication, the authors, and texts discussed:

Year	Author	Brief Title
1613	Pierre Biard	<i>The Jesuit Relations</i>
1795	James Sullivan	<i>History of the District of Maine</i>
1865	Francis Parkman	<i>Pioneers of France in the New World</i>
1905	George E. Street	<i>Mount Desert: A History</i>
1921	William Otis Sawtelle	<i>Mount Desert: The Story of Saint Sauveur</i>
1960	Samuel Eliot Morison	<i>The Story of Mount Desert Island, Maine</i>
2007	Harald Prins and Bunny McBride	<i>Asticou's Island Domain</i>

Saint Sauveur on the World Stage

The first years of the seventeenth century were a time of religious upheaval, international conflict, and colonization. In France, a burgeoning Calvinist movement threatened the authority of the Catholic Church, and the Calvinists were countered by an influential Jesuit society with access to and influence in the royal courts. An adept King Henry IV was able to balance the competing factions, but he was assassinated in 1604. Henry was succeeded by a more pliable Louis XIII, and a host of commercial, religious, and political interests vied for ascendancy into the power vacuum.²

The French, English, and Dutch sought to establish North American settlements to solidify their claims to the New World. The English, through James I's patents of 1606, claimed all the land in North America from the thirty-fourth to forty-fifth degrees of latitude, from modern-day North Carolina to Eastport, Maine. In 1611, the French King Louis XIII gave the Jesuit patroness Madame DeGuerschville almost all the North American territory between Florida and the Saint Lawrence.³ Although France and England were not in a state of war, their land claims overlapped for hundreds of miles. Almost all the Atlantic coast of North America was a borderland of disputed territory claimed by France, England, and other European nations. In addition—a fact often neglected by historians—this territory was the homeland of the Wabanaki, the native tribal nations known today as “Abenaki, Maliseet, Mi'kmaq, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot.”⁴

English aspirations to the New World were represented in the Virginia Plantation, established in 1607. Thomas Dale was appointed Governor. Captain John Smith was the chief military officer, and Samuel Argall was given the responsibility of enforcing English land claims along the coast.

The French sent a mix of explorers, traders, and priests to the land of Acadia. The Jesuit missionaries came to convert the native people to their religion. In this work, they faced great hardships of hunger, harsh elements at sea and on land, and opposition from their own countrymen and religious opponents. They established their first settlement at St. Croix, Canada in 1604, and their second at Fort Royal (now Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia) in 1605.

Father Pierre Biard, 1613

In the writings of Father Pierre Biard, we find our principal witness to the events of Saint Sauveur. His intention was to document his work as a missionary and prepare those who would follow for the circumstances that awaited them in New France. In addition, he sought to justify his role in the disasters that beset the missionary venture. Biard's account is marked by a sense of immediacy, as if the events had just happened. Indeed, Biard said he wrote while he was "Delivered now from this danger, and still wet from the shipwreck."⁵ There is an indomitable quality to Biard, a complicated man who possessed an unshakeable faith and an astonishing physical toughness. Incongruously, he managed to be both politically savvy yet quite naive about his effect on the people around him. At the end of his journey, he wondered how he survived, "so great are the perils out of which I now marvel to see myself delivered."⁶

Biard began his first mission to New France in 1608. His interpretation of what he saw and experienced was strongly colored by his religious views. He believed the native peoples were the descendants of Esau, and the French were the descendants of Jacob: "the former cast out to dwell with dragons and wild beasts; the latter in the lap and bosom of the earth with the Angels." Biard's ardent desire was to see God "make a Garden out of the wilderness; where he would subjugate satanic Monsters, and would introduce the order and discipline of heaven upon earth." Surely the land itself needed to be wrested from Satan's dominion, for the entire region, "through Satan's malevolence . . . is only a horrible wilderness."⁷

Biard catalogued his observations. He thought the natives handsome, with no facial hair, and reported, "They have often told me that at first we seemed

to them very ugly with hair both upon our mouths and heads; but gradually they have become accustomed to it, and now we are beginning to look less deformed." His view of the native people was sometimes sympathetic and admiring: "They are never in a hurry. Quite different from us, who can never do anything without hurry and worry." He wrote scornfully of native medical practices and believed native religion was "nothing else than the tricks and charms of the Autmoins." Yet he admired native burial customs, commenting,

The most beautiful part of all . . . is that they bury with the dead man all that he owns, such as his bag, his arrows, his skins and all his other articles and baggage, even his dogs if they have not been eaten. Moreover, the survivors add to these a number of other such offerings, as tokens of friendship.

These practices he compared favorably to the French, who "to become possessed of the riches of the dead, desire and seek eagerly for the loss and departure of the living."⁸

Biard tried mightily to learn the native language. Sometimes he was stymied by the lack of native vocabulary to express Christian ideas like "Holy, Blessed, Angel, Grace, Mystery, Sacrament, Temptation, Faith, Law, Prudence, Subjection, Authority, etc." Sometimes his efforts were thwarted by mischief when the natives "ridiculed, instead of teaching us, and sometimes palmed off on us indecent words, which we went about innocently preaching for beautiful sentences from the Gospels."⁹

The expedition to establish the Saint Sauveur mission arrived aboard the *Jonas*, a ship Francis Parkman called "the 'Mayflower' of the Jesuits."¹⁰ Captain la Saussaye was appointed chief of the expedition. Charles Flory was the ship's master. Two Jesuits, Father Quentin and lay brother Gilbert du Thet, were among the passengers. All told, the *Jonas* carried a floating colony of forty-eight souls. Among the supplies were some munitions, a year's supply of food (some on the hoof), and four elegant tents given by the King of France.¹¹

The *Jonas* reached New France and the little French settlement of Port Royal on May 16, 1613. Fathers Biard and Father Masse, who had been waiting for the *Jonas*' arrival, came aboard and quickly departed for the new missionary outpost. Their original destination was present-day Bangor, at the confluence of the Penobscot and Kenduskeag rivers. But the *Jonas* became lost in fog and when it lifted, the missionaries found themselves

near the eastern shore of Mount Desert Island in present-day Frenchman's Bay. In thanksgiving, they named the place Saint Sauveur, but only for a few days. Local natives persuaded them to relocate themselves and the name of the mission to a more suitable place on the western shore of Somes Sound, opposite the abode of Asticou, Sachem of the Wabanaki.

The landscape still looks very much as Father Pierre Biard described it in 1613:

A beautiful hill, rising gently from the sea, its sides bathed by two springs; the land is cleared for twenty or twenty-five acres, and in some places is covered with grass almost as high as a man. It faces the South and East, and is near the mouth of the Pentegoet [Penobscot], where several broad and pleasant rivers, which abound in fish, discharge their waters; its soil is dark, rich and fertile; the Port and Harbor are as fine as can be seen, and are in a position favorable to command the entire coast; the Harbor especially is as safe as a pond. For, besides being strengthened by the great Island of Mount desert, it is still more protected by certain small Islands which break the currents and the winds, and fortify the entrance. There is not a fleet which it is not capable of sheltering, nor a ship so deep that could not approach within a cable's length of the shore to unload.¹²

As the Frenchmen disembarked the *Jonas* and came ashore, they started to argue. La Saussaye favored immediate work on planting crops; others argued for the immediate construction of a fort. The arguing came to an end, said Biard, when the "English brought us to an understanding with each other."¹³

That understanding was borne on the *Treasurer*, a ship of 130 tons, carrying fourteen guns and sixty crewmen, and captained by Samuel Argall. Guided by Indians, who apparently thought that English and French must be friends, Argall arrived at the mouth of Somes Sound. The Frenchmen saw the *Treasurer* coming from a distance and sent a pilot boat with Flory and ten sailors aboard to discover if the unknown ship was friend or foe. La Saussaye remained ashore with most of the men, and the "more resolute" went aboard the *Jonas*, including the Jesuit brother Gilbert du Thet.¹⁴ The *Jonas* was unready for battle, anchored and immobile, her sails arrayed as sun awnings. Biard wrote, "The English ship came on swifter than an arrow,

driven by a propitious wind, all screened in pavesade of red, the banners of England flying, and three trumpets and two drums making a horrible din.”¹⁵

The action was one-sided and brutal. The English attacked with their sixty musketeers and fourteen guns, enveloping the *Jonas* in smoke and flying lead and splinters. Only Gilbert du Thet fired back with the ship’s cannon, a single un-aimed and harmless shot. When it was over, du Thet was dying, and four others were wounded. Two more French sailors were killed after jumping into the sea to escape the attack. Biard described them tenderly as “two very promising young fellows, one from Dieppe, called le Moyne, the other named Nepveu, of the town of Beauvais.”¹⁶ The Frenchmen aboard the *Jonas* and those ashore were captured or took to the woods. But after spending a night in the forest and considering the prospect of starvation should they be left there, they returned and submitted themselves to the mercies of the English.

When Argall came ashore, he demanded to see Saussaye, the commander of the expedition. But Saussaye was hiding in the woods. Argall then surreptitiously opened Saussaye’s trunk and removed his letters of commission from the French king. When the French commander came out of hiding, Argall demanded to see his papers—which, of course, Saussaye could not produce. On the pretext that the French had unlawfully trespassed on English land, leaders of the expedition were threatened with hanging.

A group of fifteen Frenchmen was allowed to leave in an open boat. They joined with ten sailors who had been out in the harbor away from the fight. The little band eventually found their way eastward down the coast, where they met French fishermen who took them home to France. In a more harrowing journey, fourteen others were taken prisoner aboard the *Treasurer* and the prize ship *Jonas*. This group was delivered by Argall to Virginia and the wrath of Governor Thomas Dale. Dale demanded to know what the French were doing on English land, and threatened to hang the prisoners. Only the appeal of Argall, and his own admission that he had stolen the letters of commission, saved their lives.

Argall was then ordered to return to New England to destroy any French ships and forts that might remain there. Biard and seven other Frenchmen accompanied him, as Biard said, in case any opportunity presented for them to continue on to France. On his return to Saint Sauveur, Argall tore down and burned the French cross and hanged one of his own men for conspiring

in a plot. Argall then took the *Treasurer* to Port Royal, and destroyed the outpost there. On the return voyage to Virginia, the ship was blown far off course, wandering the Atlantic to the Azores and then to Wales. Biard was a captive on board the *Treasurer* for more than nine months, a time of constant peril, when “a hundred times [the English] prepared the rope and the gallows for our execution.”¹⁷ By the time he finally returned home to France, he was quite surprised to find himself still alive.



Title page to Pierre Biard's *The Jesuit Relations*, 1616

Biard's account gives readers the opportunity to look with great clarity and a sense of immediacy far back into American history, and one might read his account and believe the story complete. But a fuller understanding of the events at Saint Sauveur emerges as we consider the views and perspectives that Biard omitted.

James Sullivan, 1795

One hundred and eighty one years passed before James Sullivan wrote his history of the Saint Sauveur settlement. Sullivan (1744-1808) was a prominent historian and citizen of the young American republic. A founder of the Massachusetts Historical Society, he served as Attorney General and Governor when the District of Maine was still a part of that state. He hoped his 1795 *History of the District of Maine* would form part of a larger American history. At the least, he wrote, “I have snatched from the grasp of oblivion, many valuable and useful facts.”¹⁸ But in snatching facts from oblivion, he left a few behind. In constructing his story of Saint Sauveur, he relied primarily on the work of English authors: John Smith, the military leader of the Jamestown settlement, and Samuel Purchas, a historian who wrote in 1625. Sullivan said he consulted the work of the French Abbe Raynall (1713-1796), and “the journals kept by those who first came among [the Indians] from Europe,”¹⁹ but there is little evidence that he used any French sources in telling his history of Saint Sauveur.

Sullivan's version is short. He reported, “The French erected a fort at Mount Desert, which place they called Mont Mansell [sic]; the fort they called Sauveur; and they were driven away by Sir Samuel Argal [sic] in 1613.” Catholic—and worse, Jesuit—intrigue is central to his story. He wrote that after Henry IV's assassination, “Cardinal Richelieu had the government

in his own hands. The great object was to suppress the republican spirit of Calvinism; to effect which, a great number of wise and good men were brought to public execution." As Sullivan saw it, a corrupt French government granted vast land claims to wealthy friends of the Jesuits. Sullivan diminished the French land claim by saying the Jesuit settlement was inconsequential: "The inconsiderable colony of Acadie, was in this period neglected; and the people of Virginia, in the year 1613, sent Sir Samuel Argal [sic], with a party to displace the French. . . ." Yet Sullivan contradicts his assertion that the French colony was insignificant when he emphasizes the military threat it posed. He wrote that Argall "seized Port Royal, St. Croix, Mount Mansel, now called Mount Desert, and carried away their ordnance stores." In this passage, Sullivan also makes clear his belief that Argall did not stumble on Saint Sauveur when he strayed from a fishing expedition, but was sent there intentionally to destroy the French settlements.²⁰

While in Biard's telling, Gilbert du Thet was a missionary, Sullivan imputed to du Thet Jesuit militarism and mendacity. He wrote, "Argal [sic] put a stop to their proceedings, and in an action, killed Duthet [sic], who was their principal military character." Sullivan saw the destruction of the Jesuit mission as an act that stopped a great threat to religious liberty, and "thus put an end to the expeditions in North America of an association of men, whose art, intrigue, ability, and extreme cruelty, have from that time, done great injury to Europe, and disgraced the annals of more than a century of years."²¹

There is much to criticize in Sullivan's history, beginning with his facts. In one place, he claims that in 1613, Argall removed the French from the Popham colony at the mouth of the Kennebec River, an event that is otherwise unknown to history.²² He was very selective in his choice of sources, ignoring the abundant eye-witness testimony of French writers and providing only the interpretation of Englishmen. Even contemporary American writers found fault with his work. A review published in 1802 stated, "Whoever expects to find a regular and well connected series of useful and important facts arranged in chronological order . . . will be disappointed."²³ In the intervening years, that criticism has held up better than Sullivan's history.

Francis Parkman, 1865

Francis Parkman wrote *Pioneers of France in the New World* in 1865, just after the end of the Civil War. He dedicated his work to three kinsmen, "slain in battle."²⁴ One might picture Parkman laboring over his account of

bloody conflict at Saint Sauveur, while nearby lay the newspapers with their accounts of slaughter at places like Antietam, Gettysburg, and Cold Harbor. Parkman was a prodigious American historian who is influential to this day. Every year, the American Historical Association gives the Francis Parkman Award to the author of the best book of American History. One of the peaks in Acadia National Park is named Parkman Mountain, in the author's honor.

Yet Parkman is often seen critically from a contemporary perspective. A Parkman title like "Some of the Reasons Against Women's Suffrage" no longer holds up well, nor does his assertion of the superiority of European culture and bloodlines. Describing Samuel Champlain's arrival in the New World, he wrote, "The roar of Champlain's cannon from the verge of the cliff announced that the savage prologue of the American drama was drawing to a close, and that the civilization of Europe was advancing on the scene."²⁵ Yet even with these defects, Parkman was a masterful historian, both for his capacity for research and his style of writing. Parkman's achievement is marked by his ability to command and synthesize a wide range of sources and then convert this information into a rich and compelling narrative. For his *Pioneers of France in the New World* he drew on a trove of sources. He could add to Biard's eye witness testimony the memoirs of his fellow Jesuit Marc Lescarbot, and through Lescarbot's eyes explore conflict and dissension within the French camp that Biard glosses over. Biard, Parkman noted, spent a great deal of time sailing in close quarters with worldly enemies. Both traders and Jesuits were on board the *Jonas*, and when they departed France, Parkman wrote, "friend and foe set sail together."²⁶

Parkman wrote that the European powers' vast imperial claims were contradicted by the humble nature of the first settlements. Though aspirations were lofty, the first settlements were tenuous. As Parkman described it, "Here lay the shaggy continent, from Florida to the Pole, outstretched in savage slumber along the sea, the stern domain of Nature. . . . On the banks of James River was a nest of woe-begone Englishmen, a handful of Dutch fur-traders at the mouth of the Hudson, and a few shivering Frenchmen among the snow-drifts of Acadia."²⁷

Parkman had a way of coloring bare facts in a manner that enhanced but retained the truthfulness of his source document. For example, compare Biard's and Parkman's descriptions of the *Jonas* arrival at Mount Desert. Biard's original account is unembellished:

We recognized that we were opposite Mount desert, an Island, which the Savages call Pemetiq. The pilot turned to the Eastern shore of the Island, and there located us in a large and beautiful port, where we made our thanksgiving to God, raising a Cross and singing to God his praises with the sacrifice of the holy Mass. We called this place and port Saint Sauveur.²⁸

Parkman takes the same image but colors it with his personal observations of the scene:

Saussaye anchored in a harbor on the east side of Mount Desert. The jet-black shade betwixt crags and sea, the pines along the cliff, penciled against the fiery sunset, the dreamy slumber of distant mountains bathed in shadowy purple, —such is the scene that in this our day greets the wandering artist, the roving collegian bivouacked on the shore, or the pilgrim from stifled cities renewing his jaded strength in the mighty life of Nature.²⁹

Parkman also used his personal knowledge of Mount Desert Island and the suggestion of a local resident to assert a geographical place for the location of Saint Sauveur. He wrote, “Here, about a mile from the open sea, on the farm of Mr. Fernald, is a spot perfectly answering to the minute description of Biard.”³⁰

Parkman used many more source documents than either Sullivan or Biard, and so provided a more thorough history, balancing the words of biased witnesses with the weight of contrary testimony. He concluded that the actions of Captain Argall were treacherous, saying the attack “was utterly unauthorized.” He also casts doubt on Biard’s veracity, presenting evidence that Biard assisted Argall in the attack on the French settlement of Port Royal, as a punishment to the merchants there for their sins and lack of cooperation with the Jesuits.³¹

Every historian who seeks to describe the history of North America must first get past the ghost of Francis Parkman, whose looming shadow covers our understanding. He is a giant among historians and his work dominates the historiography of the region, influencing his own readers and generations of historians and writers that followed. Yet he is a vexing figure in the historiography of Indian and Euro-American relations. Says Bruce Trigger, an eminent writer of native history, “Parkman viewed the contest for North America as one in which the most advanced society of the time had

triumphed over more primitive ones.”³² According to David Hackett Fisher, prize-winning historian and biographer of Samuel de Champlain, “Parkman’s work was marred by major interpretive error, but it was important in another way. He created the most visually striking images. . . .”³³ The historian must discern Parkman’s bias in the glare of his brilliant prose, and detect his shadow where it may be cast on the writings of subsequent historians.

George E. Street, 1905

The Reverend George E. Street (1833-1904) was not a professional historian but he was highly educated and deeply committed to knowing the people and history of Mount Desert Island. As a retired clergyman, he had the time to interview local people and gather their stories and documents. As a student of theology, he interpreted the religious underpinnings of the conflict. Street recognized an inherent conflict in the French mission, writing, “The proselytizing spirit was sometimes incongruously mixed up with the hope of commercial gain.”³⁴

Street built his account along the narrative line supplied by Parkman, but departed from it to broaden the scope of his history. Street defended the reputation of Samuel Argall, writing, “Argall was undoubtedly a bold, resolute, somewhat ruthless and unscrupulous man of action, but his exploits do not seem to deserve the superfluous condemnation bestowed on them.” Street poured through the French and English diplomatic correspondence, court records, and other documents that followed the attack on Saint Sauveur. His research of the documents led him to the conclusion that Argall was justified, and simply doing his duty. He wrote, “The records of Virginia completely vindicate him from the common charge of piracy and mention that he was given a certificate, under the seal of the colony, declaring that he had in no way exceeded the commission given him.” Street also traced the history of the *Treasurer*, following the ship to her grave in a Bermuda river inlet, where her guns were used to equip a fort there in 1620.³⁵

Street’s work is one of those books of local history that needs to be read with caution. William Otis Sawtelle’s personal copy of Street’s *Mount Desert Island, a History* is filled with marginal notations, many of them critical: “No excuse for these errors!” and, “wrong,” “again wrong,” and finally, “How do such things get by in a history?”³⁶ But, except for the correction of a single misspelling, Street’s chapter on Saint Sauveur entirely avoids Sawtelle’s penciled critique. Though Street’s larger text must be read with caution, his section on

Saint Sauveur reflects the considerable energy and devotion of the author.

William Otis Sawtelle, 1921

William Otis Sawtelle was by training and profession a physicist, but he will be best remembered for his extraordinary devotion to the history and genealogy of Mount Desert Island. He founded the Islesford Historical Museum, now a part of Acadia National Park, and authored many monographs and tracts on the topic of Island history. The William Otis Sawtelle Collections and Research Center at Acadia National Park is one of the most important repositories of island archives and artifacts.

Sawtelle's own work was marked by language that sometimes echoes his scientific training, as when he refers to the "ocular demonstration" that revealed the attractiveness and suitability of Fernald Point as a location for the settlement. His scientific precision is seen also in his dating of Argall's attack to mid-July, a conclusion deduced from dates recorded in correspondence and calculations of travel times and distances. Sawtelle attributes much consequence to chance, as when the French plans for planting a settlement in Acadia were first revealed to the English. A chance wind blew the ship carrying the Jesuits into the English harbor of Newport. The news of the Jesuits' intention to plant a settlement in Acadia traveled from Newport to Virginia, and Argall was dispatched from Virginia to Maine on his mission of destruction. Chance struck again in the form of the fog that caused the *Jonas* to steer away from an intended settlement on the Penobscot and land instead on Mount Desert Island.³⁷

Like Parkman, Sawtelle also added his personal observations of Mount Desert Island to enhance the tale, describing the scene with the eye of one enamored with the coast of Maine:

There in all the glory that Spring imparts to hillside and valley, lay the Island of the Desert Mountains, its tall pines and pointed firs, mingling with birches, whose lighter shades made dark contrast with darker evergreen; while barren summits, catching the rays of the long-hidden sun, gleamed like hammered brass.³⁸

Sawtelle writes frankly of Argall's deception:

On the day following, La Saussaye, driven by hunger from his

woods retreat, gave himself up. He was at first treated kindly by Argall who asked to see his commission. When these important papers could not be produced, for the very good reason that they were in Argall's pocket, the English captain stormed and ranted called the French outlaws and pirates, threatened them and told them they all deserved death.³⁹

Sawtelle quoted extensively from the diplomatic correspondence that followed the conflict. In a letter to the English court, French Admiral Henri de Montmorency described the raid, the deaths, the injuries, and costs, and demanded satisfaction. In the back and forth that followed, the English claimed the French were unlawfully on their land and that the French fired first at the English ship. In the end, the French received little satisfaction from their complaint; though the *Jonas* was returned to the ship's owner, Madame de Guerchville, no other recompense was received for the destruction of property or loss of life. After weighing all of Argall's actions, Sawtelle came to believe, as did Street, that Argall acted legally and in accord with his commission from the Virginia Plantation. Sawtelle concluded that the French were largely at fault in the episode, that they never should have settled in the disputed territory of Mount Desert, and that they would have found greater opportunity and security had they founded their settlement on the St. Lawrence.⁴⁰

Samuel Eliot Morison, 1960

Samuel Eliot Morison was an Admiral in the United States Navy, and author of more than thirty books on maritime history topics. A few of the awards and honors bestowed on him include the Presidential Medal of Freedom, two Bancroft prizes and two Pulitzer prizes. A fast frigate USS *Samuel Eliot Morison* was commissioned in 1986. Though he grew up in Boston, his love of the sea was nourished in a lifetime spent among the islands and waters around Mount Desert Island.

Morison's short book, *The Story of Mount Desert Island*, is a light work, prepared to be read aloud at "an evening of song and story," a benefit for Island libraries in July 1959.⁴¹ As suited the occasion, his text was intended for an audience of friends and neighbors. We can appreciate Morison's work for his knowledge of ships, sailing, naval warfare and of the sea, particularly the coast of Maine. He had a command of history and confidence in

supplying details. He also could paint a vivid scene, as when he described the moment the *Treasurer* attacked:

Next day the *Treasurer* came booming through the Western Way with an east wind on her beam. She was cleared for action, flying a big red battle ensign and a flag with the arms of the Virginia Company, and red canvas waistcloths stretched from fo'c'sle to poop. She whipped around the eastern point of Greening's Island, and bore down before the wind on *Jonas* at anchor.⁴²

Morison's tale of Saint Sauveur is a mere five pages, a concise story told in a light tone. Before the attack, wrote Morison, "Everyone in Saint Sauveur, whether Frenchman or Indian, was happy as a clam at high tide." His description of battle is more evocative of Hollywood and Errol Flynn than the stark and cruel reality of the historic event. He wrote, "Captain Argall ordered 'Borders Away' and in a jiffy his merry men were swarming over the French bulwarks." This book might well be considered a work of leisure for such an accomplished historian. We see in it a style of storytelling that is entertaining, suited to his audience, accurate if concise, and more likely to be read than any other work cited here. Mount Desert Island has long attracted a sophisticated colony of summer residents and it is rare for a local history to be written by historians of the stature of Parkman and Morison.⁴³

Harald Prins and Bunny McBride, 2007

The last history for consideration was written by the husband and wife team of Harald Prins and Bunny McBride. Both authors are on the faculty of Kansas State University, and both have written extensively on Native American subjects. Their work, *Asticou's Island Domain: Wabanaki Peoples at Mount Desert Island 1500-2000* was created with the support of the National Park Service and the Abbe Museum of Bar Harbor, Maine.

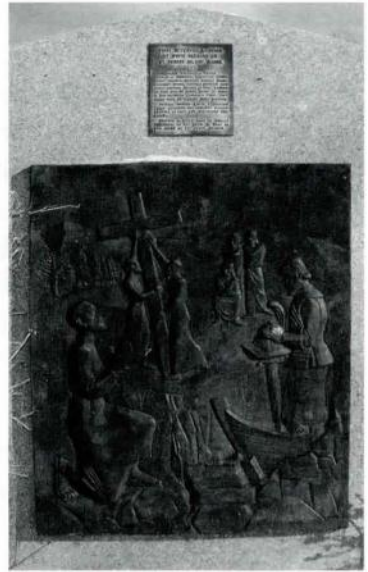
McBride and Prins' history of Saint Sauveur is innovative and original. They see the events through Wabanaki eyes, and so recount a story told as never before in nearly four hundred years. The authors treat the Wabanaki with a respect that was missing from previous histories. They write of the Wabanaki, and Etchemin, and Tarrantines—specific tribes, for to generalize the various tribes under the umbrella term "savages" is not only insulting, but

is as grave an error as assimilating the French, English, and Dutch into a single entity.

In undertaking their research, the authors addressed the difficult challenge of reconstructing a history of the Wabanaki people, for whom there is only fragmentary documentary evidence prior to 1850. Prins and McBride assembled all the research available from new and old sources: ethnographic studies, oral histories, and a wide array of primary and secondary materials, to reconstruct the world of the Wabanaki on Mount Desert Island in the seventeenth century. Their work outlines the geographic, political, and temporal framework for a Wabanaki history. To know the actions of individuals and tribal groups involved in the Saint Sauveur incident, they relied heavily on Father Biard's account, placing his references to specific Indians within the larger context of the Wabanaki world.⁴⁴

Through Prins and McBride's telling, we can appreciate the role of the Wabanaki within a specific time and place in their history. Before Saint Sauveur, there was war with the Tarrantines to the east. To the west, the English had launched raids and kidnappings. In the years after Saint Sauveur, European-borne diseases swept ninety percent of the native population away. Prins and McBride also describe Wabanaki political structure and issues. They identify Asticou as the Sachem of the Wabanaki, who were part of the larger alliance known as Mawooshen, a political confederation that spanned almost the entire coast of Maine.⁴⁵ Asticou's responsibilities at Mount Desert Island included keeping watch over Mawooshen's "eastern door." In light of the varying pressures facing the natives, modern readers come to understand their alliance with the French at Mount Desert as a strategic imperative, an opportunity to gain French protection from English raiders and rival tribes.

When quoting Biard, McBride and Prins redact the coarse generalization "savage," replacing it in brackets with the preferred "Indians." The authors also note the benevolence shown to the French by Wabanaki, who, Biard wrote, "used



Jesuit settlement memorial, commissioned by J.J. O'Brien, at St. Ignatius, Northeast Harbor. Photo by Don Lenahan

to come to us stealthily and by night; and, with great generosity and devotion, commiserated our misfortune, and promised us whatever they could."⁴⁶ Prins and McBride's work demonstrates the importance of the historical imagination as a first step to creating a context for historical evidence. Their work required them to draw inferences from evidence that was missing and to engage sources from a wide range of disciplines—not only the primary and secondary sources of conventional history, but also oral tradition, ethnography, and geography. They conceived a new way of looking at the history of Saint Sauveur and created an original work that sheds new light on an old story.

Conclusion

There is no *history* of Saint Sauveur; there are *histories*. Each reveals as much about the author's present as it does about the events of 1613. From Pierre Biard, we perceive the immediacy of his experience, as if the pages of his account still smelled of salt air and smoke. We can feel his breathless incredulity that he survived his ordeal, and his eagerness to defend the mission's failure. From James Sullivan, we have the patriot leader, writing clumsily at times, asserting the superiority of English land claims over French, since it was English land claims that Americans won in the Revolution. Francis Parkman gave us the first work of a professional historian, comprehensively gathering all the possible sources and distilling them into cogent narrative and memorable prose. George E. Street was the first to write a history out of affection for the island, using his leisure to exercise his curiosity, intelligence and industry, and bringing to bear his religious insights to enlighten an episode heavily weighted with religious content. William Otis Sawtelle's telling of the story combined his zeal for the history of his island home with the meticulous focus of the scientist. From Samuel Eliot Morison, we have the historian at ease, who, after a lifetime of serious historical study, holds forth for friends and neighbors on a topic and a place that he loves, his purpose to entertain as well as enlighten. Finally, from Harald Prins and Bunny McBride, we get an expanded story, thoroughly reconsidered from a Native perspective that was blindingly overlooked in previous histories, and is now finally recounted with respect and consideration.

The histories of Saint Sauveur have been told and retold for nearly four hundred years. The eyewitnesses are long gone, but with the passing of time, more evidence becomes available to scholars and is synthesized into new interpretations. We might wonder if we are getting closer to an

understanding of what happened. Do new interpretations get us closer to the truth, or does the march of time carry us farther away? This question is one that has long perplexed historians, including Edwin Hallett Carr, who tackled the subject in his book, *What is History?* Carr's answer is that the present continually alters our understanding of the past. "As we move forward," said Carr, "we gradually shape our interpretation of the past." History is contemporary. The historian must operate within a context of the present and conduct an "unending dialogue between the present and the past." A book like Prins and McBride's *Asticou's Island Domain* would not have been possible in 1865, nor would the racial prejudices of Parkman's *Pioneers of France* have been published in the modern era.⁴⁷

As we look at these works, we should be mindful that the facts left out of the story are as revealing as the facts left in. Historians are very selective in their fact finding, just as history is selective in its fact leaving. In *A History of the District of Maine*, Sullivan wrote little of the French perspective, even though it was available to him. In *Mount Desert: A History*, Street was hardly cognizant of Wabanaki agency, even though native people lived in his community, and the Wabanaki were key actors in the Saint Sauveur event. According to Carr, "the historian will get the facts he wants."⁴⁸

We must acknowledge, then, that the present shapes our own understanding of the past in ways we cannot fully appreciate. Perhaps the most challenging question we could ask ourselves is how the histories of the future will reshape the histories we write. The histories of Saint Sauveur are all marked by facts the authors missed or ignored. All could only have been written within their time. The histories of Saint Sauveur should serve as a reminder to us that the history we write today is prone to the blindness of the present.

Notes

¹ Compare "Illustrated map of Mount Desert Island, re-print of 1932 by Valentine Tonone" to US Geologic Survey, Charles Walcott, Director, Edition of May 1904. Both are in the collection of the Mount Desert Island Historical Society, Flat File #1: Drawer #10: Folder #10-4.

² Francis Parkman, *Pioneers of France in the New World* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1867), 251-57.

³ Parkman, *Pioneers*, 270, 286.

⁴ Harald E. L. Prins and Bunny McBride, *Asticou's Island Domain: Wabanaki Peoples at Mount Desert Island, 1500-2000* (Boston: Northeast Region Ethnography Program, National Park Service, 2007), i.

⁵ Pierre Biard, "Relation of New France," in *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents:*

Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (Cleveland: Burrows Brothers, 1897), 3: 27 (hereafter cited as "New France").

⁶ Pierre Biard, "Letter of Father Pierre Biard, to the Very Reverend Father Claude Aquaviva," in *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (Cleveland: Burrows Brothers, 1897), 3: 5 (hereafter cited as "Letter").

⁷ Biard, "New France," 35, 33.

⁸ Biard, "New France," 73, 85, 131.

⁹ Biard, "New France," 195-97.

¹⁰ Parkman, *Pioneers*, 307.

¹¹ Biard, "New France," 261.

¹² Biard, "New France," 271.

¹³ Biard, "New France," 273.

¹⁴ Biard, "New France," 279.

¹⁵ Biard, "New France," 279. A pavesade is a canvas screen used in battle to conceal the action on deck from the enemy.

¹⁶ Biard, "New France," 283.

¹⁷ Biard, "New France," 27.

¹⁸ James Sullivan, *The History of the District of Maine: Illustrated by a new correct map of the District* (Boston: I. Thomas and E.T. Andrews, 1795), iv.

¹⁹ Sullivan, *District of Maine*, 97.

²⁰ Sullivan, *District of Maine*, 156-57, 273-74.

²¹ Sullivan, *District of Maine*, 276.

²² Sullivan, *District of Maine*, 170.

²³ Review of *The History of the District of Maine*, by James Sullivan, *American Review and Literary Journal* 1801 (1802), 201.

²⁴ Parkman, dedication to *Pioneers*.

²⁵ Charles Haight Farnham, *A Life of Francis Parkman* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1901), 289; Francis Parkman, "The Jesuits in North America," in *The Francis Parkman Reader*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (New York: Da Capo, 1998), 27.

²⁶ Parkman, *Pioneers*, 273, 263.

²⁷ Parkman, *Pioneers*, 268, 269.

²⁸ Biard, "New France," 265.

²⁹ Parkman, *Pioneers*, 275-76.

³⁰ Parkman, *Pioneers*, 277.

³¹ Parkman, *Pioneers*, 285, 287.

³² Bruce Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers: Canada's "Heroic Age" Reconsidered* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1985), 11.

³³ David Hackett Fischer, *Champlain's Dream* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 541.

³⁴ George E. Street, *Mount Desert: A History*, ed. Samuel A. Eliot (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1905), 8.

³⁵ Street, *Mount Desert*, 49, 50, 44.

³⁶ Street, *Mount Desert*, 89, 105, and 113; Marginalia found in William Otis Sawtelle's personal copy, graciously provided by his grandson, Robert Pyle, Director of the

Northeast Harbor Library.

³⁷ William Otis Sawtelle, *Mount Desert: The Story of Saint Sauveur* (Bangor, 1921), 11, 12, 6-9.

³⁸ Sawtelle, *Saint Sauveur*, 9.

³⁹ Sawtelle, *Saint Sauveur*, 14.

⁴⁰ Sawtelle, *Saint Sauveur*, 22-23.

⁴¹ Samuel Eliot Morison, dedication to *The Story of Mount Desert Island, Maine* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1960); Robert Pyle, email to author, December 6, 2010.

⁴² Morison, *Story of Mount Desert*, 17.

⁴³ Morison, *Story of Mount Desert*, 17, 18.

⁴⁴ Prins and McBride, *Asticou's Island Domain*, 12.

⁴⁵ Prins and McBride, *Asticou's Island Domain*, ii.

⁴⁶ Biard, "New France," 17.

⁴⁷ E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 163, 35.

⁴⁸ Carr, *What is History?*, 26.