



## *The Norwood's Cove Object: Saint Sauveur in History and Legend*

By Tim Garrity

### *Introduction*

In 1946, a local man named Christopher Lawlor gave a mysterious object to the Southwest Harbor Public Library. The librarian who accepted the donation wrote:

This dagger owned by Christopher Lawler was unearthed by him at a depth of 18 inches, a greater depth than a plough would ever reach, when he was digging a hole in which to plant a tree on his grandfather's farm at Norwood's Cove in 1921.

The land on which this dagger was found ... is not more than a quarter of a mile from the "Jesuit Meadows" on Fernald's Point. It is therefore reasonable to assume that it was once owned by one of the Jesuit group who settled there. Circa, 1613.<sup>1</sup>

The *Bar Harbor Times* reported that the "weapon is of bronze with [copper] inlays and bears the marks of ancient workmanship." For more than seventy years, the object has been on display at the library, kept behind glass in a hand-carved wooden case. For decades, viewers have wondered if it is an artifact of Saint Sauveur.<sup>2</sup>

In the summer of 1613, a violent collision of European empires took place

in the vicinity of Mount Desert Island. A party of French Jesuits founded their mission of Saint Sauveur, only to have it destroyed within a few weeks by a force of Englishmen from Virginia's Jamestown settlement. Several Frenchmen were killed, others driven away in small boats, and the rest taken as prisoners to Jamestown. Among the dead was Brother Gilbert du Thet, the first Jesuit missionary to die in North America.<sup>3</sup>

### *Biard's Relations*

The precise location of the mission was forgotten in the two-and-a-half centuries that followed. The letters of Father Pierre Biard, a Jesuit priest who was present throughout the brief life of Saint Sauveur, saw limited publication in France and were seen only by a handful of scholars. Then, in 1858, the Canadian Government published Biard's account in a larger collection of missionary reports, the *Relations des Jésuites*.<sup>4</sup> A Bangor attorney, Elijah L. Hamlin, read Biard's description of the site of Saint Sauveur as "a beautiful hill, rising gently from the sea, its sides bathed by two springs." Hamlin concluded that Fernald Point, a grassy peninsula on the west shore of Somes Sound, matched Biard's text.

In 1865, Francis Parkman wrote in *Pioneers of France in the New World* that he was indebted to "E. L. Hamlin, Esq. of Bangor, for pointing out this locality." Parkman wrote, "Here, about a mile from the sea, on the farm of Mr. Fernald, is a spot perfectly answering to the minute description of Biard." However, there is a problem with Parkman's assertion. Parkman wrote, "Biard says that the



This map of Mount Desert Island published in 1917 by Waldron Bates, Edward L. Rand, and Herbert Jaques, labeled Fernald Point as the site of Saint Sauveur (see inset). Some historians believe that a site on the shore of Lamoine (at the top of the map) is a more likely location. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress*

place ... was 'séparé de (apart from) la grande Isle des Monts Déserts.' He was evidently mistaken in this." Parkman's interpretation of the evidence requires his readers to believe that Biard did not know where he was. Yet, Biard was quite familiar with the geography of the region. He explored the area on three different journeys in 1611, and spent several weeks there in 1613. As anyone who is a little familiar with Mount Desert Island knows, the west shore and east shore of Somes Sound are part of the same island. <sup>5</sup>

A straight reading of Biard's account suggests that Saint Sauveur may have been located on the mainland. But in the mid-nineteenth century, Francis Parkman was one of the most eminent historians in America. Though his views on race, immigrants, and the rights of women now seem appalling, he was then held in such regard that his say-so was enough to firmly link Saint Sauveur to Fernald Point.<sup>6</sup>

A map published in 1917 by Waldron Bates, Edward L. Rand, and Herbert Jaques concurred with Parkman's interpretation. This map, published the year after the Sieur de Monts National Monument was created, notes the site of "The First French Settlement" and "Jesuit Spring." For place names, the authors relied on "much careful investigation of ancient maps, plans, and records," as well as "the invaluable assistance given by natives of the Island."<sup>7</sup>

The founders of Acadia National Park had a stake in Saint Sauveur's connection to Fernald Point. In their testimony before Congress, they often referred to the island's historical value. The Secretary

of the Interior testified that Mount Desert Island was "the place where Champlain first landed on this coast, and the French had a station here years before the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers."<sup>8</sup>

### "Evidence"

In addition to the testimony of authorities, local tradition asserted the Fernald Point location, and locals sometimes produced artifacts which appeared to be the remains of the settlement. In 1860, an Italian Jesuit missionary, Father Eugene Vetromile, was led to believe that the foundation of a wrecked barn on Fernald Point was the ruins of a Jesuit fortification. He described a "wall that is at present about 4 or 5 feet high," and noted, "There are persons living on this land who remember this wall about 10 feet high." But a photograph taken three years earlier shows that a barn had recently stood on the same site. Also, Biard's account of the mission makes clear that the French failed to build a fortress, opting instead to put their energy into gardening, and thus they were defenseless against the English attack. Vetromile was fooled by locals who must have known that the "fortification" was actually the foundation of a demolished barn. Vetromile sketched the site and published it in a catechism he made for Indians.<sup>9</sup>

The Norwood's Cove object is another example of findings that purport to link Saint Sauveur to Fernald Point. Library officials tried to identify the origin and nature of the object from the time it was presented to the library in 1946, until 2004. They consulted with numerous experts and volunteers who offered various hypotheses: that the object is an ornamental device used in French Catholic religious ceremonies, a type of spear called a halberd, a pike-like weapon called a spontoon, or a decorative piece of Americana. The library ultimately concluded that none of the assessments were definitive. In a letter thanking experts for their



Christopher Wendell  
Lawlor (1893–1956) with  
"Dick" and "General."  
*Courtesy of the Southwest  
Harbor Public Library Digital  
Archive, Item 6956*

opinions, library board member Peter Obbard wrote that the object would be displayed with "a new, authoritative and suitably ambiguous caption."<sup>10</sup>

In "The Histories of Saint Sauveur," (*Chebacco*, Volume XII, 2011) I explored the different ways historians have written about Saint Sauveur over the past four centuries. In the course of that research, I learned of the mysterious object at the Southwest Harbor Library and thought we should renew the investigation with resources that previous researchers did not have at their disposal, including social media and web-based search engines. I posted photographs and a brief description of the object and its possible link to Saint Sauveur along with the question, "What is it?" to the Facebook pages of the Mount Desert Island Historical Society, the French Colonial Historical Society, and the community discussion board of the American Historical Association. I also emailed armaments museums in North America

and Europe, and other contacts within the historical and archaeological fields.<sup>11</sup>

Experts and amateurs promptly weighed in with comments and guesses, the following among the more cogent observations:

Though it has a blade and resembles the head of a pole arm like a halberd or a spontoon, the object cannot be a pole-mounted weapon, because its un-socketed base could not be attached firmly to a pole. Nor could it be a dagger, because it has no handle, and rather than being balanced, it is offset with a definite front and back.<sup>12</sup>

The object is not four hundred years old, with a history of being buried in the earth from 1613 to its discovery in 1921; it does not show the degree of corrosion expected



for an iron implement buried for centuries in the salty and acidic soil of coastal Maine.<sup>13</sup>

If the object was a missionary's religious device, it would have been made in a more refined and ornate style, with better materials.<sup>14</sup>

Though it resembles a finial for a Victorian-era fence, we examined hundreds of photographs and catalog images of ornamental fence tops and found nothing like the Norwood's Cove object. The thin blade of the Norwood's Cove object is dangerously sharp and too delicate for placement atop a fence. Such finials were commonly produced with three dimensions to give them greater strength. Another suggestion is that the object might be part of a fancy crest rail, lightning rod, or weather vane, meant to be placed atop a roof. However, we found no similar examples of such work.<sup>15</sup>

The object might be a letter opener, but that could not be its original purpose. The handle is short and asymmetrical, making it awkward to manipulate.<sup>16</sup>

And then, a breakthrough: I sought out experts in France to learn if they had seen anything like the Norwood's Cove object. Christophe Pommier, Associate Curator of the Artillery Department at the Musée de l'Armée in Paris, knew exactly what we had. He said the object is a piece of World War I-era trench art formed "from the body of a shell (type 75 mm) including the copper belt." He noted that the copper belt across the base of the object is "still encrusted in the steel of the body of the shell." The nodes of the copper "driving belt" were designed to fit into the grooves of a rifled barrel, causing the shell to spin.<sup>17</sup>

I sought corroboration from Evy Van de Voorde, Collections Manager at the Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917 in Belgium. She concurred that the object is a piece of trench art. "Soldiers," she wrote, "made all sorts of objects from empty shells or any material that they could find.... I would agree with the opinion that the object was

made from the body of a shell."<sup>18</sup>

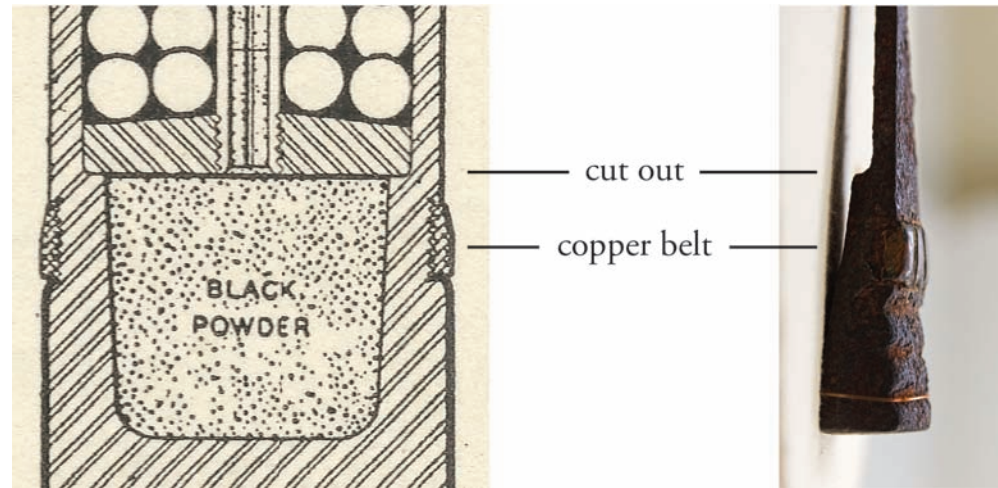
As the accompanying illustration shows, the Norwood's Cove object has clearly been cut from the body of a 75 mm shell. If this finding is definitive, new questions arise. As Southwest Harbor Public Library Director Meredith Hutchins wrote, "The real mystery is, how did it come to be buried deep down in the ground at Norwood's Cove?"<sup>19</sup>

Christopher Lawlor claimed to have found the object near the supposed site of Saint Sauveur. Born in Southwest Harbor in 1893, Lawlor grew up a short distance from Fernald Point. Lawlor had access to trench art. He enlisted in the Army in April, 1918, and served with the 301st Supply Train in France. He came home in 1919 to Southwest Harbor, married, raised a family, and managed an ice cutting and a hauling and storage business.<sup>20</sup>

If Lawlor planted the object, why did he do it? Did he simply present the object and listen with amusement as others created a backstory to explain it? Ralph Stanley, who, as a young man, knew Lawlor well, said, "This sounds exactly like something Chris Lawlor would do." Stanley remembers Lawlor as a man who loved to play practical jokes. With the Norwood's Cove object, Lawlor fooled everyone for nearly a century, from 1921 until 2017. He died in 1956, never having revealed his secret.

If Vetromile's map is a hoax and the Norwood's Cove object a long-running practical joke, there remains a piece of evidence that no one can verify or refute. Among the items reported lost in a 1911 fire that destroyed the collection

"A comparison of the Norwood's Cove object and the design for a French 75 mm shrapnel shell shows the correspondence between the copper driving belt and a cutout in the shell wall. Jennifer Steen Booher photograph. The sketch is a detail from Douglas Thomas Hamilton, *Shrapnel shell manufacture*. (New York: Industrial Press, 1915). Figure 1, page 3.



of the Bangor Historical Society was, "A pike and dagger found on the old French mission ground, Mount Desert." The unfortunate loss of these artifacts points to the importance of current efforts to create a History Trust to protect Mount Desert Island's collections from fire and other ravages of time.<sup>21</sup>

#### *Where was Saint Sauveur, Really?*

Historians have taken opposing sides in the debate on the real location of Saint Sauveur. Americans like Francis Parkman, Samuel Eliot Morison, and David Hackett Fischer favor the Fernald Point site. Canadians, such as Lucien Campeau and W. J. Eccles, contend that a site on the mainland is more likely. Archaeologists have been steadfast in their agnosticism; their studies of Fernald Point over the past hundred and sixty years have yet to produce any credible proof to support either opinion. Still, it

is possible that the brief settlement left little trace, so the Fernald Point location cannot be ruled out until the whole site has been comprehensively searched. Archaeologists Peter Morrison and Pamela Crane noted that many sites on the coast near Mount Desert Island could have matched Biard's description and they concluded that, in the absence of archaeological findings, the "available written documentation is simply too vague for us to know where the site was located with certainty."<sup>22</sup>

We may never know the true site of Saint Sauveur, yet the Fernald Point site has historical significance, because it illustrates how a historical uncertainty can gain acceptance as a fact that is repeated by mapmakers, historians, tourism promoters, and the founders of a national park. I write this in a time when "alternative facts" are advanced as legitimate alternatives to verifiable facts, when fake news is regarded as real news and vice versa. A University of Maine student drew a larger lesson from the mystery of Saint Sauveur when she wrote, "Inside of the tales of history lie falsities and it is the job of the historian to determine and extract the truth



from the lies."<sup>23</sup> Historians seek the truth, though it may ever lie beyond their reach. The location of Saint Sauveur is not as certain as legends and place names suggest, but there is value in discerning the parts of the story that are true from those that are false, and from those that may never be known.

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1. Meredith Hutchins, Ed., "The Norwood's Cove Object," Unpublished manuscript, Southwest Harbor Public Library; This is a notebook that contains the library cards and all the primary sources cited throughout the rest of this article; Records of the object's finder sometimes spell his name "Lawler" and sometimes "Lawlor." The Southwest Harbor Public Library, where many of his photographs and records are kept, catalogs his name as "Lawlor."

2. *Bar Harbor Times*, October 24, 1946; Part of the newspaper article is illegible and "copper" is assumed.

3. Lucien Campeau, "Du Thet, Gilbert," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 1 (University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003), accessed March 7, 2017, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/du\\_thet\\_gilbert\\_1E](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/du_thet_gilbert_1E).

4. 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: 271; For a publication history of the Jesuit Relations, see Joseph P. Donnelly, S.J., *Thwaites Jesuit Relations: Errata and Addenda*, (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1967), 1-21; Government of Canada, *Relations des Jésuites*. Augustin Côté, Ed. (Quebec: Pres de l'Archeveche, 1858), accessed April 20, 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/klgcw8z>.

5. On the other hand, an early publication of Biard's account, dated 1616, uses not the word "séparé" (apart from) but "réparé" (strengthened by). The latter term would allow a location on either Mount Desert Island or the mainland. See Pierre Biard, *Relation de la Nouvelle France* (Lyon: Louis Muysguet, 1616), 225, accessed February 1, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/y9x4qmus>.

6. Lucien Campeau, "Biard, Pierre," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. 1, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003, accessed November 3, 2017, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/biard\\_pierre\\_1E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/biard_pierre_1E.html); Francis Parkman, *Pioneers of France in the New World* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1876), 277, accessed November 3, 2017, <https://archive.org/stream/pioneersfrancei01parkgoog#page/n121/mode/2up>.

7. Waldron Bates, Edward L. Rand, and Herbert Jaques "Map of Mount Desert Island Maine" (Boston: Walker Lith. & Pub. Co., 1917); Edward L. Rand and John H. Redfield, *Flora of Mount Desert Island, Maine* (Cambridge: John Wilson and Son, 1894), 30.

8. "Statement of Franklin K. Lane, Secretary of the Interior," *Mount Desert National Park, Hearing before the Subcommittee of the Committee on the Public Lands... Hearing on H.R. 11935, A Bill to Establish the Mount Desert National Park in the State of Maine* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1918), 6.

9. Tim Garrity, "Real and Imagined France in Acadia National Park," *Chebacco*, Vol. 18 (2017), 100-121.

10. "Excerpt from letter concerning 'Object' found at Jesuit Meadows," "The Norwood's Cove Object," Southwest Harbor Public Library; Riley Sunderland (Maine Archaeological Society) to Meredith Hutchins (Southwest Harbor Public Library Director), July 13, 1984; Josephine Jacobs (Higgins Armory Museum) to Meredith Hutchins, September 26, 2003; Donald Fennimore (Winterthur Museum) to Peter Obbard (Southwest Harbor Public Library Board), January 29, 1984; Wallace Gusler (Colonial Williamsburg) to Peter Obbard, April 17, 1984; Obbard to Fennimore and Gusler, April 24, 1984.
11. I am indebted to all the respondents, including those not directly cited here, for their invaluable advice and suggestions.
12. Jimmy Krause, email messages to author, March 22, 23, 27, 29, and 30, 2017; Benjamin Bouchard, Facebook comment to Mount Desert Island Historical Society Facebook page, March 22, 2017.
13. Jimmy Krause, email message to author, March 23, 2017; Benjamin Bouchard, Facebook comment, March 22, 2017; Ron Kley, email message to author, March 24, 2017.
14. Anne Marie Lane Jonah (Historian, Archaeology and History Branch, Parks Canada, Halifax, NS) email message to the author, March 24, 2017; She suggests that it is not a religious object, because, "they tend to be better material, and more refined, especially for missionaries to carry."
15. See, for example, The Champion Iron Company, "Miniature Catalog No. 12," (Dayton: Troup Mfg. Co, ND). Accessed March 26, 2017, <https://ia800701.us.archive.org/15/items/miniaturecatalog00cham/miniaturecatalog00cham.pdf>; Ron Kley, email message to the author, March 24, 2017.
16. Sandra Urban, Cathy Katz, and Barbara J. Ward, Facebook comments to the Mount Desert Island Historical Society Facebook page, March 22, 2017.
17. Christophe Pommier, email message to the author, March 30, 2017; Translation from French by the author.
18. Evy Van de Voorde, email to the author, April 6, 2017.
19. Meredith Hutchins, "Norwood's Cove Dagger (?)," "The Norwood's Cove Object," Southwest Harbor Public Library.
20. Maine Military Index, Christopher W. Lawler, accessed April 9, 2017, [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com).
21. *1864-1914, Fiftieth Anniversary of the Bangor Historical Society* (Bangor: Bangor Historical Society, 1914), 37, accessed April 20, 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/k39qxlq>. At this writing, the History Trust, a consortium of fifteen island collecting organizations, is exploring the feasibility of collaborating with many island organizations to protect our collections from destruction, to participate in a common catalog, and to encourage community engagement by providing full access to the historical collections.
22. Francis Parkman, *Pioneers of France in the New World* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1876), 277; Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Story of Mount Desert Island Maine* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960) 11-15; David Hackett Fischer, *Champlain's Dream* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008) loc. 14212-14213, Kindle; Lucien Campeau, *The Beginning of Acadia 1602-1616, Book I, The Explorers*, Trans. William P. Long and George F. Topp (Bridgetown, N.S.: Gontran Trotter, 1999), 82, Note 35; W.J. Eccles, review of *Monumenta Novae Franciae*, by Lucien Campeau, S.J., *Histoire Sociale / Social History*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1968), accessed April 7, 2017, <http://hssh.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/hssh/article/view/40510/36693>; Peter Morrison, "Another Lost Colony— The St-Sauveur Mission on the Coast of Acadian Maine," (Unpublished manuscript of a presentation to the Eastern States Archaeological Federation, November 2, 2013), 11-12.
23. Rachel Snell, email message to the author, October 25, 2017.