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A NOTABLE RUIN LOUISBOURG

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE
NOVA SCOTIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
NOVEMBER 10TH, 1908.

BY

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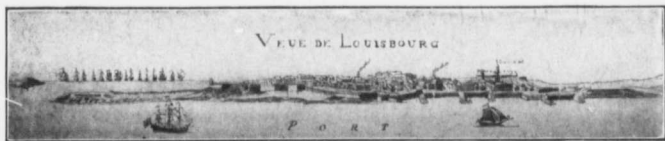


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THE NOVA SCOTIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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A NOTABLE RUIN

LOUISBOURG

The history of the town of Louisbourg is not my subject, Parkman's two chapters about the sieges have omitted nothing essential or picturesque in their description of these events: no historian of Europe who treats of the middle of the XVIIIth. century wherein the colonial Empire of the world passed from France to Britain omits its name, and the archives of this Society have been enriched with the results, careful, scholarly and engrossing, of the researches of its members. While these do not exhaust the material available, the subject of this paper is the topography of the place, to put before you as clearly as may be what remains of the town and fortress, what may be traced of those operations of defense and attack which bring the

A NOTABLE RUIN

story of Louisbourg into the current of world history, and make it of particular moment to the history of Canada, of French colonization, of military science.

Let us at the outset look far back into history. We find that what longest survives is the thing which people, men of passions like to our own, keen about the same things as we are, made for beauty. The wealth, the learning, the laws, the social structure of Assyria are gone, but alone of all Assyrians did, today exists the sculpture wrought by her artists to adorn the temples and palaces, a delight and an inspiration to the sculptor of today. Change the name and the sentence stands equally true for Egypt. Coming to later times Greece has left a heritage which is richer. Her literature, her philosophy are still potent influences, but it may be maintained that the artist follows more directly the examples of Praxiteles than the modern thinker, the philosophy of Plato. Next to these things, the flowering of old civilisations in material which has endured the vicissitudes of time, survives the memory of places where great events happened. Carthage and Troy are ancient and endur-

LOUISBOURG

ing names which overshadow in importance anything saved from their sites. Waterloo was an obscure Belgian hamlet until Napoleon and Wellington met there. There are scores of places in Europe known to all on account of their past, while their contemporary importance is so little that they merit mention only in a local guidebook.

What is there in its history to bring Louisbourg into the same rank as those places? We cannot dwell on its history as a colony for that is as dead as the tradings of Phoenicia, but two events happened which make it important, first, the capture by the New England colonists in 1745; secondly the capture in 1758; the first, so to speak, the result of an impulse; the second, one of the important events of the great Seven Years War, fought in India, America and in Europe.

The direct result of the first was ephemeral, the treaty of peace which concluded the war restored Louisbourg and its dependencies to France; but the indirect results were more enduring. For the first time, the militia of New England engaged in regular warfare. A siege, I take it, is the most conventional of all

A NOTABLE RUIN

military operations. Their opponents were trained soldiers, defending a fortress vastly more important and stronger than anything held in America by the British Crown. While many of them knew its weakness, for the New England trader was more familiar with Louisbourg than with any other place outside New England, it was by his standards a strong place.

So when the gunners of New England, untrained except as privateersmen, its militia unused to anything but irregular warfare lightheartedly took Louisburg in 1745 as promptly and efficiently as did the great expedition of 1758, it heightened in the colonist a sense of his own importance, which, it may be, is never entirely wanting in the colonial Briton; and it does not seem unreasonable to believe that his victory over the French troops at Louisbourg, no less than his comparison of himself in American warfare with the regulars of the British army, gave him heart, when a generation later he took up arms against the mother country. The cession of Louisburg by the treaty of Aix la Chapelle struck hard at colonial interests, and no one likes to sacrifice

LOUISBOURG

particular good for the benefit of the body politic. The irritation it produced was great and widespread, and in the colonists kept alive a desire for its recapture which made them eager for the renewal of hostilities. . The sense that the betrayal of their interests heightened by the fact that it was the spoils of their prowess which were given back, was not strengthening to the bonds which held the colonies to the Crown.

The second capture is what brings Louisbourg into the forefront. It was a strongly fortified port placed where it commanded the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the single entrance to the vast colonies of Canada, so Louisbourg in the possession of France, as a base for a French fleet in the North Atlantic, and Canada was safe indefinitely. Louisbourg in British hands, and it was only a question of time when Canada must fall. What this meant we can only realise by looking at the map. Britain held from Maine to Georgia with Acadia (Nova Scotia) and Newfoundland. The rest of the continent to the Rockies was French with the exception of Hudson's Bay. The key to this vast treasurer house was Louisbourg.

A NOTABLE RUIN

When the grapple came it was the first place to be attacked; its cession settled the matter. The opinion of the civilian on military strategy should perchance not be uttered, but my reading of the significance of these events is that on that eventful morning of the spring of 1760, when the British inside Quebec, the French encamped over against it, watched with the last degree of eagerness the first ship to arrive from sea break out her flag, both French and English conscious of the momentous import of the event, had the "Lowestoft" proved to be a French frigate, forerunner of a fleet, Quebec would again have been French, but Louisbourg being British, the triumph would have been temporary, and its recapture by de Levis as impotent to alter the main course of events as Montcalm's victories in 1758.

The supremacy of sea power is illustrated in those campaigns. Old as the Greeks, restated admirably in our times by Captain Mahan, it is amply illustrated by the events of the Seven Years War. To no other living people should it appeal more keenly than to the overseas citizens of the Empire to which we belong.

LOUISBOURG

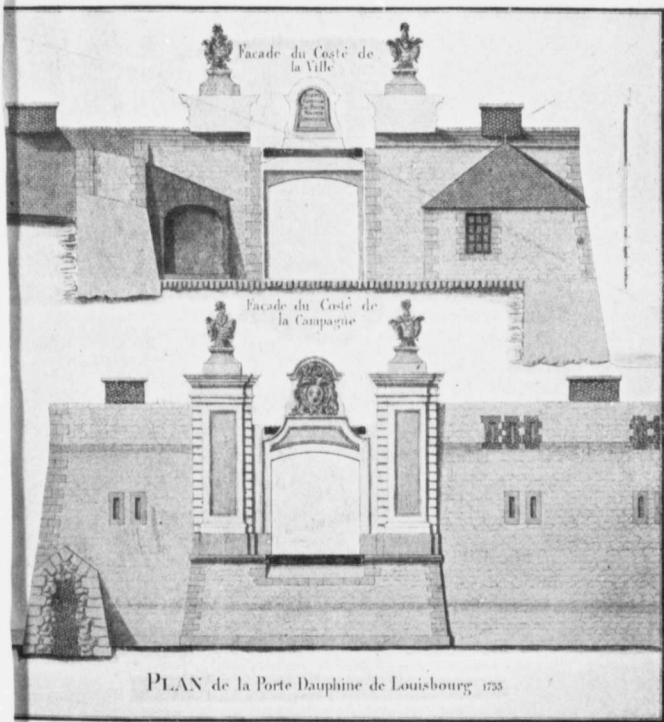
To the supremacy of the sea power in the hands of England, at this epoch, is owing the fall of the French Colonial Empire. It was a period when France's naval power was at its lowest, but low as it was, its destruction in these waters by the capture of Louisbourg, its base, was a great feat of arms. It should not pass unnoticed that no less a person than Washington said that without the assistance of the French fleet in the American Revolution the colonies would not have achieved their independence; from the standpoint of the impartial historian, a fine evening up to France for the loss of Canada in the previous war. The exposition of this theme is attractive in more respects than as a contribution to the history of military tactics. The soundness of the British policy of strengthening her navy, the evil consequences to France of allowing hers to become weak, are proved by the events which took place on these coasts, events which brought out such gallant actions, both French and English, that it is with regret we find them without the bounds set for this paper.

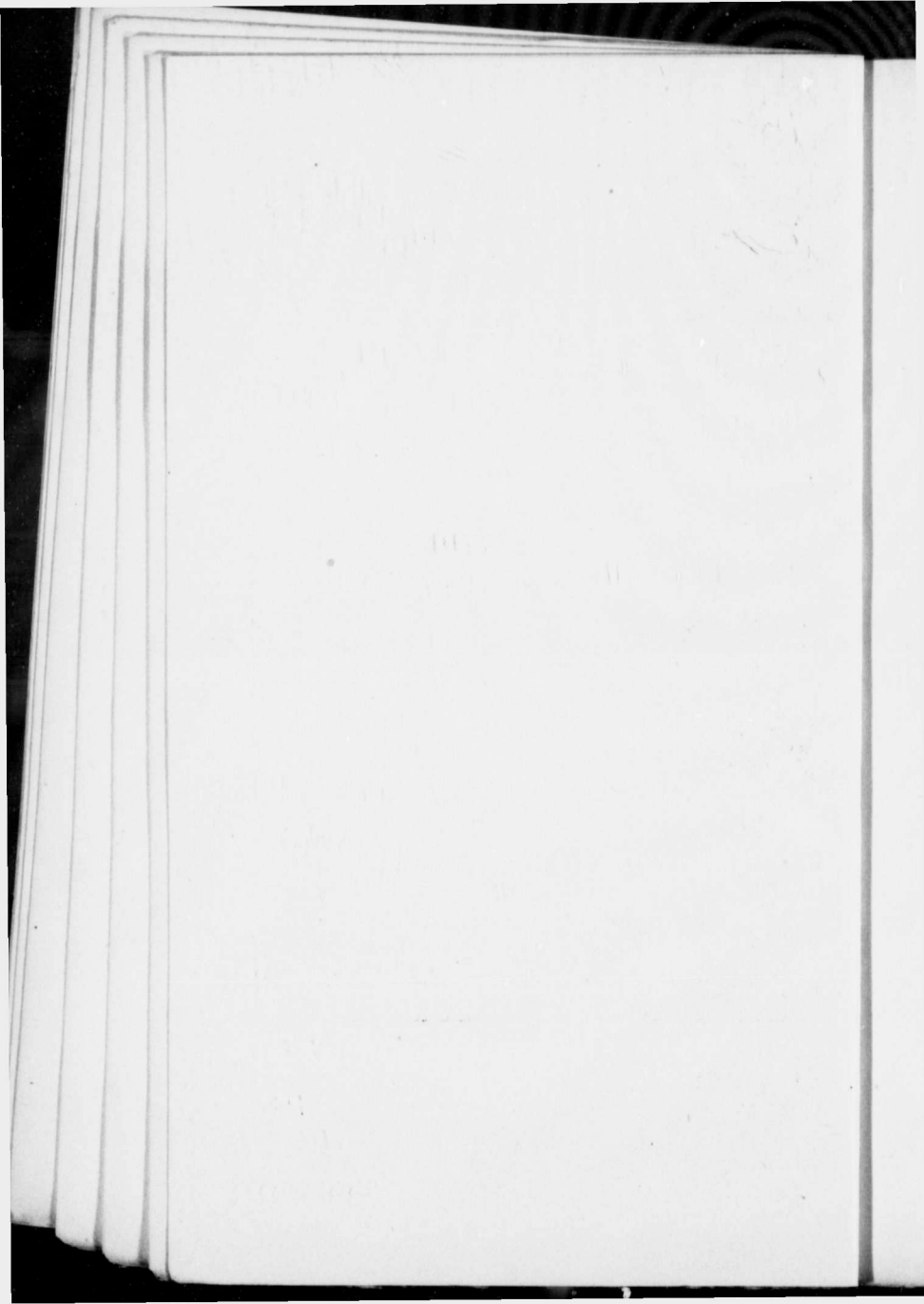
Louisbourg, the naval base which made Canada secure, which threatened the British

A NOTABLE RUIN

Colonies, is situated not far from the Southeast point of the Island of Cape Breton, just beyond the Bay of Gabarus. Along the northern shore of that bay there rises from the water a stretch of moor and marsh, in places open, in others covered with scrubby trees, and this ends in a low point which forms the south-west side of Louisbourg harbor. Inland from this plain are higher hills which follow at a short distance from the shore, the windings of the sea coast and of the port. As the plain falls from them to the shore it is broken in several places by hillocks which command the uniformly level point. The French military engineers took advantage of three of these hillocks, the middle being the highest, and utilised them in laying out their work, and extended from harbor to sea a line of works, the highest hill crowned by the citadel, or King's Bastion, which contained the Governor's house the Chapel and the barracks. The principal gate of the town was close by the waters of the harbor, and was defended by a spur and demi-bastion, the former of which had guns which swept the harbor. This was known as Dauphin Gate and Bastion. Beyond the

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LOUISBOURG

citadel on the sea side was the Queen's Bastion, an important work which was strengthened by a demi-lune after the return of the place to France in 1749, and at the seashore a demi-bastion Princesse, from which a wall extended along the inaccessible shore to the eastward works, which consisted of two demi-bastions. A battery was placed on the shore of the harbor, and from it extended a wall which shut in the harbor side of the town. These works encircling the town, were built on the approved system of Vauban. The outermost was the smooth turf of the glacis, which rose from the moor to the edge of the parapet, four feet above the narrow banquette, on which infantry could stand in shelter and sweep with musketry the slopes of the glacis and the ground beyond. Below the banquette was the Covered Way, twenty feet in width, on which troops could assemble and manoeuvre, and within this was the ditch eighty feet wide, from which rose the wall from thirty to thirty-six feet high, crowned with a rampart, within which was a banquette and open space for the cannon, which fired through embrasures in the parapet.

A NOTABLE RUIN

Distributed along these works, but for the most part in the bastions, were one hundred and twenty-three cannon, of which sixty-nine were of 24 lbs., and 29 of 42 lbs; that is heavy guns. (The French accounts make many more, but the above is taken from the Journal of Gordon of the Royal Artillery and is probably correct.) But Louisbourg did not depend entirely on the artillery on its walls; on the extremity of Point Rochefort was a battery of seventeen guns; on the Island beyond, commanding the narrow entrance to the harbor, was a battery of thirty-nine guns, and facing the entrance to the harbor was the Royal Battery which, as it was commanded by the hills above, was dismantled by the French, and not used during the siege of 1758. In 1745 it was abandoned by the French, taken possession of by Pepperrell's forces and its guns turned with effect against the town.

The length of the western fortifications was about 1000 yards, and from their interior to the eastern bastions about a quarter of a mile, which was the length of their longest streets. These were narrow, only twenty-four feet wide, the houses mostly of wood. So with

LOUISBOURG

fisheries the principal industry it could have never been entirely satisfactory to fastidious senses, but it must have been picturesque. Here soldiers in white uniforms, naval cadets in scarlet and gold, officers from the ships in blue, met with the fishermen, the townspeople, the monks and the missionaries, and among them the traders from New England. There would have been in the harbor two or three scores of French fishing vessels, men-of-war, models to all countries of the best in naval architecture, French East Indiamen, which had brought thus far their precious cargoes, and lay at anchor refitting for the last stage of their voyage from the Pacific, and among them the coasters of the country and New England. On the windswept point, broken by the mounds of the old works, it is as difficult to picture the town, sheltered by its walls, surmounted by its citadel, crowned by its lofty buildings, as looking over its empty harbor, to see the fleets which for forty years crowded its waters.

A few words of history are perhaps necessary to make clear the narrative. Newfoundland, Hudson's Bay Territory and Acadia were ceded to Britain by the Treaty of Utrecht

A NOTABLE RUIN

in 1713, and that France might retain a foothold on these coasts, from which to prosecute the fisheries, the Islands of Cape Breton and St. John's, (P. E. I.), were acknowledged hers. Cape Breton was settled, Louisbourg fortified, and France shared in what was then the greatest source of American wealth, the fisheries of these waters; so great was it that in the middle of the century its annual value was estimated as worth to France about £950,000. From 1713 to 1744 was, with one exception the longest peace between France and England in two centuries, and the new colony made progress. The fortifications were laid out and built, beginning in 1718, and being practically finished about 1735. With many vicissitudes the colony grew and its trade extended. Primarily it was commercial in its object. Its military importance was belittled by the authorities, its trading success fostered, the object of the French being to control the fisheries, the object of the New England merchants to secure them all for themselves. So when war broke out in 1744, and the Governor of Louisbourg irritated the New Englanders by the capture of their little settlement

Nova Scotia Historical Society

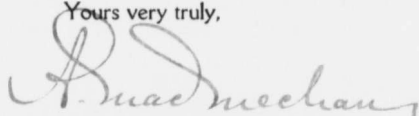
Sir :

No long argument is needed to bring home to every patriotic Canadian the duty of preserving historic sites as national monuments. The people who forget their past are not likely to have an important future. The Quebec fetes of 1908 have done much to impress this principle on the mind of Canadians; so Louisbourg, both by its natural position and by having been the scene of two great conflicts, is, in historic interest, second only to Quebec. The sieges of 1745 and 1758 are memorable not only for the brilliancy of the attack and the obstinacy of the defence against heavy odds, but for the far-reaching political consequences of these struggles.

You are earnestly requested to read the accompanying pamphlet and to use your influence, and if necessary, legislative action, for the purpose of keeping this famous battle ground as a constant reminder of the sacrifices and glories of our past.

I have the honour to be,

Yours very truly,



President, Nova Scotia Historical Society.



LOUISBOURG

at Canso, and by a feeble attack on Annapolis, while privateers of both colonies preyed on each other's commerce, the temper of Massachusetts rose to a point, that it finally, through its Assembly, acquiesced in its Governor's proposal to send an expedition against Louisbourg. Gathered in a few weeks, the force of under 4,000 men, under the command of Pepperrell, established a base at Canso where Commodore Warren, commanding on this station, joined them with his squadron. They arrived on April 30th in Gabarus Bay before a town and garrison which had made no preparations for defense, landed without opposition, established one by one their batteries, nearer and nearer the walls, until on June 16 breaches had been made through which the town could be stormed, the order of attack for the ships had been arranged, and the place being no longer tenable was surrendered to Pepperrell and Warren. England heard the astounding news of the feat of her colonial subjects. A fortress and its garrison of 650 troops and 1310 militia surrendered to the colonial militiamen. Making allowance for the smallness of the garrison and the fact that

A NOTABLE RUIN

it was distinctly on the defensive, so that the New Englanders had not to stand attack, and the fine weather, it remains a remarkable instance of what intelligent and willing men can accomplish under favorable conditions.

Louisbourg was held first by the colonists, much against their will, then by a regular garrison until the end of the war, and was restored to France, by the Treaty of Aix la Chapelle. It was evacuated and repossession taken by the French in 1749, but it was a better Louisbourg which they received. Much work had been done. The fortifications were strengthened and new barracks built, while in the parade ground of the citadel bomb proofs were built which can still be seen.

Conditions made the peace of 1748 little more than a truce. While it lasted Louisbourg was strengthened and its garrison increased. When as a consequence of colonial friction and European complications, war broke out, Louisbourg, escaping attack in 1757, was besieged the following year. The expedition under Boscawen and Amherst, using Halifax as its base, sailed thence and appeared in Gabarus Bay on the 2nd of June. The

LOUISBOURG

naval force consisted of twenty-three men-of-war mounting 1544 guns, sixty-seven frigates, and the land forces and munitions of war employed 144 transports. The land forces were close on 12,000 men. The expedition was amply supplied with materials for a siege. They brought one hundred and forty pieces of artillery, about ninety thousand shot and shell, and forty-nine hundred barrels of powder. The amplitude of the supply is indicated by the fact that there were used only about fifteen hundred barrels of powder and about fourteen thousand shot.

To oppose this attacking force there were in the harbor of Louisbourg twelve men-of-war mounting 556 guns, of which only one escaped, and the captured garrison, consisting of 3031 men, and the crews of the ships, who served on shore, numbered 2606, besides an uncertain, but not large number of militia. Bad weather delayed the landing, which was opposed, until the 8th of June. It was not until the 19th that the first battery opened fire, and the siege went on until on the 26th of July the town surrendered. The second siege took practically the same length of time, with

A NOTABLE RUIN

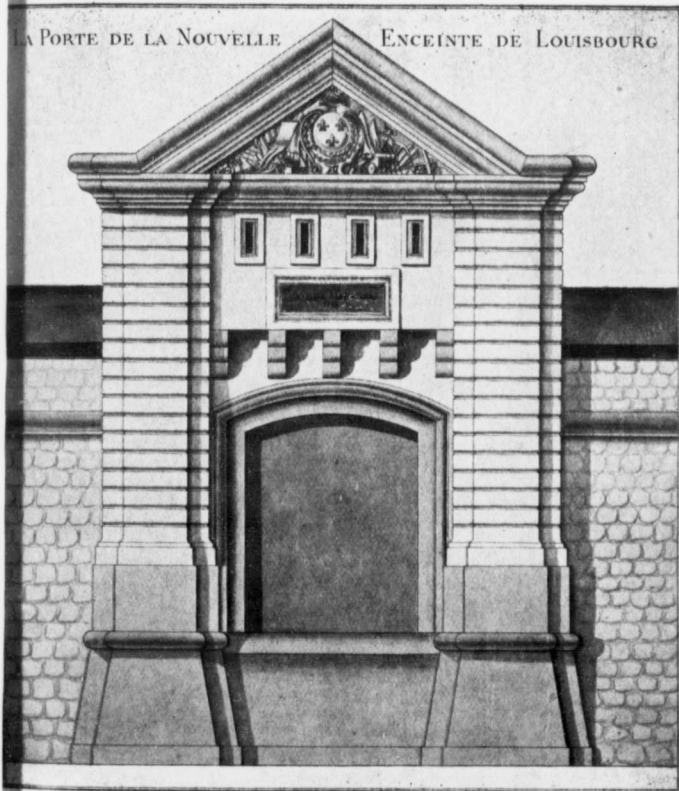
the same proportion in numbers as the siege of 1745.

The desire of Pitt was the annihilation of French sea power for with it must fall her colonial empire and end the wealth she drew from the Atlantic fisheries. The maintenance of a base in America, where ships might refit, from which protective or offensive operations might be conducted, was essential, and Halifax having been established it was sound military reasoning which led to his orders to demolish Louisbourg, and to make its harbor useless. Considerations of expense and time modified his projects, but the demolition of the fortifications was completed in 1760. There had been possibilities of peace throughout all, but the earliest years of the war, but to American colonists at all events the destruction of Louisbourg gave satisfaction, for, if again British diplomacy yielded what British arms had won, that which would be returned would be ruins, and not a fortress of enhanced value.

Enough remains on the ground notwithstanding the demolition and the effects of time, to make it possible by using the documents which exist, to reconstruct the city as it was.

LA PORTE DE LA NOUVELLE

ENCEINTE DE LOUISBOURG





LOUISBOURG

The French were admirable mapmakers, and their centralised administration made necessary constant reports with plans attached, which show all the stages of such work as the fortification of Louisbourg. These are available to the student in the repositories of Paris, where, for example, in one collection are nearly one hundred plans of the town and works of Louisbourg. There are many others in other collections. Fortunately for the historian a *Sieur Lartigue*, King's storekeeper at Louisbourg, was an amateur engineer of no mean skill, and probably after the cession of the place he beguiled the tedium of waiting for deportation to France, by drawing a very complete plan of the English operations in 1758.

An unknown hand has been equally explicit for the operations of 1745. With these guides, one can find on the ground traces of the batteries which the besiegers erected, the site of the camp along Fresh Water Brook which was used by *Pepperrell* and *Amherst*. Below the ruins of the light house, the first erected on these coasts, can be traced the outlines of the battery from which first, *Gridley*,

A NOTABLE RUIN

and in '58, Wolfe silenced the Island Battery, and made open the way into the harbor for the blockading fleets. On the eastern ridge, which overlooks Coromandiere Cove, one may stand and see the outlines of the earthworks, from which by so decisive a repulse Saint Julien drove back the eager forces of Wolfe before they landed, that they were spared falling in a slaughter like that of Ticonderoga, so strong were the defenses of the French.

Looking down from the same slope one may search for the little space of sand, but twelve or fourteen yards in extent, surrounded by rocks, where three young officers and their men, after Wolfe had given the signal to retreat, made good a landing and retrieved for him the success which his gallant direct attack had not achieved.

On the shores of the harbor above the brook which runs into the Barachois are the foundations of the battery erected with the special object of driving away from her moorings the little frigate *Arethuse*, her skilful and incessant fire having impeded the advance of the siege batteries. The position being no longer tenable, *Vauquelin*, her captain, made

LOUISBOURG

so fine a sortie through the blockading fleet that, after the capture, Boscawen asked who he was, and being told, said that if one of his junior captains had done as well, his first care on his return to England would be to ask for him the command of a ship of the line. So gallantly did the same Vauquelin fight his ship at Quebec, that the British put a vessel at his disposal with orders to land him at the French port he might select.

Coming to the town itself, the demolition of the fortifications has obliterated the exact lines of the different parts of the defensive works. The glacis and ditch are distinct, foundations of the buildings of the citadel are to be seen, and the buildings in best preservation are casemates on either side of the parade ground erected during the British occupancy, but guided by a map all the works can be positively identified. So it is with the buildings of the town. The streets are easily traced, not only are their name known, but it is possible to give the owners of most of the dwellings, who were mostly officers of the troops and civil officials; while along the waterfront were some official buildings and the establishments of the more important merchants.

A NOTABLE RUIN

A little way back from the quay stood the parish church of "Our Lady of the Angels." Before its altar was buried the Duc d'Anville. Peer of France, Admiral of her navy, who commanded that great Armada which sailed in 1746 to recapture Louisbourg. Tempest and plague followed the mighty fleet to Chebucto, where D'Anville died, overwhelmed by disaster. When Louisbourg was returned to France, the "Grand St. Esprit" brought back to French soil his remains and Des Herbiers, the Governor, records the place of his burial. This should be easily identified. The burial place at Point Rochefort is known. The ruins of the hospital stand up, and it is probable that a little excavation might reveal some of the elaborate ornamentation of the town gates.

In short what I have seen of the site and of the documents I feel certain that the complete reconstruction of the place is only a question of intelligence and outlay.

Is it not fitting that these things should be preserved? They are now exposed to all the hazards of private ownership. The future historian, the Canadian of later generations visiting the places where his country was made,

LOUISBOURG

has a right to expect from his forerunners the preservation for them of what the past has handed on to us. It was the lot of the men of five generations ago to do epoch making deeds, ours is the humble task to preserve the memorials of them. Our discharge of that duty will make it more easy, it may be, for our successors to rise to emergencies which may try their powers.

The preservation of historic sites is too large a task for private or co-operate undertaking. Indeed, part of its significance would be lost were it not the action of the people through their governments. They should acquire the land, defray the cost of removing all that obliterates or disfigures ancient remains, and give an annual grant to maintain the grounds. The most efficient way would be through a commission. For such work, if ill done is worse than neglect.

The posts of the besiegers should be marked as well as the defenses, the principal buildings and the streets. Here and there should be tablets, one to the exploit in landing of Brown, Hopkins and Grant; another to Vauquelin; a third to Madame Drucour.

A NOTABLE RUIN

wife of the Governor, who daily passed along the fire swept ramparts to encourage the gunners. Plans exist for the house of the Intendant. It is suitably placed, and as it is typically French of the epoch, it would make an admirable museum. Therein should be a collection of relics from the ruins, of maps and plans a nucleus for such a collection existing. Possibly if such a museum were solidly established Harvard College might return to it the cross from the church carried to New England after 1745, and fortunately preserved by that institution. But, however, worked out in detail there is necessity for taking prompt action.

You in Halifax are working along sound lines in the memorial to the first meeting of a representative assembly within the Empire outside the British Isles.

Within three months from his services as Brigadier at Louisbourg, Lawrence, as Captain General of Nova Scotia, summoned its first assembly. There is more than this personal connection between these two events. The capture of that fortress and its sequences made the soil of Canada British, the representative assembly which met in Halifax, nineteen men,

LOUISBOURG

not all of British stock, led to its people becoming masters of their own destinies.

A handful of people in Nova Scotia, a conquered colony, alien in language and allegiance along the St. Lawrence, and the vast territory of unknown land which stretched in solitary spaces to the Pacific, such was Canada at the end of the struggle with France. In the years which have passed since then, the colony existing for the commercial benefit of the mother country, has risen to the status of a self-governing state of an Empire wherein the descendants of both parties to the old struggle are fellow citizens, charged with a common task. Let us not forget that it was no difference in valour, in self-sacrifice, in intelligence which determined the result of that conflict. Its outcome was inherent in those causes which led one people to attain self-government, the other to be subjects of an absolute monarchy. Therefore, while you carry to completion your commemoration of the principle which shapes the destinies of peoples to become greater than any of us foresee, lend your aid to preserve, before preservation becomes more difficult, the site where events oc-

A NOTABLE RUIN

curred which made possible, over the whole of North America, self-government and all its means to mankind.

On the 9th [N. S.] of September, 1713, the little group of Frenchmen who founded Louisbourg took possession of Cape Breton in the name of the Most Christian King. Nearly two centuries have gone by since then, but the anniversary of that day would be a most fitting time to mark the completion of an effort to preserve the memory of that colony with all that its fortunes have signified to France, to Britain, to America. The responsibility for this rests on our Society, on Nova Scotia, on Canada, and the view that the initiative should be taken by this Society is one which I trust will commend itself to its members.

NOTE.—The map of the siege operations is made from two maps now in the Section Hydrographique of the French Admiralty, which give the sites of the batteries.

The original drawings of the views of the gates are in the Archives of the Colonial Office at Paris, as is the view of the town which was drawn about 1755 by M. de la Rigaudiere of the French Navy.

J. S. McL.

PETERSFIELD,
Cape Breton,
January, 1909.



