



Portrait of Sir William Pepperrell, 1746
John Smibert (1688-1751)

Peabody Essex Museum
Salem in History, 2006

Portrait of Sir William Pepperell, 1746

Boston

Oil on Canvas

Gift of George Atkinson Ward

106806

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

William Pepperell (1696 - 1759) was the son of a prosperous merchant and land investor from Kittery Point, Maine (then part of the Massachusetts Bay Colony). Pepperell married Mary Hirt of Boston in 1724, and was made a militia colonel of Maine in 1726. Pepperell's success as a commander of a colonial militia against the French at Louisbourg in 1745 earned him a baronet from the British King. Pepperell was a well-respected and highly successful colonial citizen. Nathaniel Hawthorne used Pepperell as a literary subject for two of his short stories, "Sir William Pepperell" (1833) and "Grandfather's Chair" (1840).

The victory at Louisbourg settled King George's War, the third of four wars fought in America between British and French colonists and allies. The eventual victory over the French (with the Treaty of Paris in 1763) was a source of great pride for Britain, and for the colonial citizens who participated in the war. The expense of the campaign, however, further depleted royal coffers. Great Britain began to seek new ways to raise funds through taxation policies. Such legislation as the Sugar Act (1764) and the Stamp Act (1765) was passed, and American colonists resented the imposition. Formerly, the colonists had raised their own taxes with their own Acts as needed.

ART HISTORICAL CONTEXT

This John Smibert (1688-1751) was the first important trained artist working in New England. He immigrated to America from Britain 1729 as part of a group led by Dean (Bishop) Berkeley and was originally bound for Bermuda. The plan fell through, and Smibert settled in Boston, where he worked as a professional artist. The portrait depicts Pepperell standing proudly in full military uniform as "Victor of Louisbourg, A.D. 1745," as states the inscription on the painting. Behind him in the distance (pointed to by his left hand), the battle is represented with cannon balls arching down upon a French fort amongst gunfire and smoke

SAMPLE GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Give 5 words to describe Sir William Pepperell, based on his portrait.
- What else do you see in this scene? Why do you think it is included?
- What do you think Pepperell's role was in this war? Why do you say that?
- After the victory at Louisbourg in Canada, the British government taxed Pepperell's colony (Massachusetts) to help pay for the French and Indian war. They ignored the tradition of letting the colony decide on and collect their own taxes. How do you think Pepperell would feel about this? Do you see any connection between this and the causes of the Revolutionary War?

SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- Before examining this painting, have students read Nathaniel Hawthorne's story, "Sir William Pepperell." Ask students about Pepperell's accomplishments and what they imagine Pepperell would look like.
- Compare this portrait with a contemporary military portrait of a man or woman. Is it possible to analyze both portraits in order to understand political or economic factors that contributed to conflicts in their respective time periods?

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