



Editorial

A quick scan of the running heads in this issue will reveal that it is about individuals, individuals whose life stories *NEQ*'s authors seek to uncover and to which they assign meaning. We begin in the era of the Revolution and end after the Civil War.

On 26 April 1777, teenage heroine Sybil Ludington (the female Paul Revere) mounted her sorrel colt, Star, and road out forty miles from home; along the way, she rallied local militia against a British force marching toward the military depot at Danbury, Connecticut. Or did she? In a widely researched, fast-paced narrative, Paula D. Hunt sorts out the particulars of how the legend originated, gathered force, and has appealed to a broad spectrum of Americans—old and young; liberals and conservatives; scholars and laypeople; the National Rifle Association and *Ms.* magazine. The sheer staying power of Sybil's story proves that Americans are not, as is often bemoaned, indifferent to their country's history; rather, as Hunt so persuasively shows, they seek in it larger patterns that give significance not only to the past but to the present as well.

The only surviving narrative of the life of William Larned is his obituary. Almost two centuries later, Gabriel Loiacono has combed through public records to detail how this overseer of the poor, a hardworking man with eighteen children to support, walked the streets of Providence, Rhode Island, disbursing the town's assistance to the settled poor while also dispatching those who had no legitimate ties to the community. Due to the precariousness of his own existence, Larned was sympathetic to his clientele, but he never forgot that he served at the pleasure of his employer, the taxpayers. Carefully balancing economic, humanitarian, and political calculations, Larned was both powerful and humble, a public functionary who brought honor to himself and his family, an everyman of early America who weathered its vicissitudes.

In the summer of 1849, Charles W. Upham, a Salem clergyman who had recently launched a political career, orchestrated Nathaniel Hawthorne's removal from his post at the Salem Custom House. Approaching *The House of the Seven Gables* as a *roman à clef* of sorts, Jonathan A. Cook traces the various ways in which Hawthorne pillories Upham by portraying him as the novel's emblematic hypocrite Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon. The Judge's minutely described demise, set as it is in Witch City, is a particularly fitting coup, for Hawthorne drew his plot's climactic scene from Upham's own *Lectures on Witchcraft*. Having turned his animus into enduring literature, Hawthorne thus secured his revenge for the ages.

In 1863, Shepard Gilbert left Cambridge and followed his Harvard friends to a cluster of islands off the South Carolina coast. In the wake of a recent Northern victory, Port Royal's white residents had fled, leaving behind their plantation homes, unharvested cotton, and more than eight thousand slaves. Young New Englanders with strong antislavery convictions traveled south to be of assistance. Smugly racist, Gilbert did not share their motivations. As Robert G. Mann demonstrates, however, Gilbert's attitudes shifted as his encounters with black men and women became more frequent, less stratified, and increasingly intimate. Whereas W. E. B. DuBois celebrated the unparalleled value of a cross-racial "contact of human souls" in edifying and elevating black folk, Mann shows that Gilbert, too, received in the South a civics education that profoundly altered his life.

We end the issue with William C. Dowling's reflection on the brief career of Bostonian Dr. James Jackson Jr., who studied in France in the 1830s at a time when Paris physicians were challenging the bleeding and purging typical of the era's medical practice. Back home, Jackson's father, also a physician, held firm to traditional practice, but he exposed Boston's medical community to his son's experiences and questionings when he published the young man's letters.

The final life story I will allude to here is my own. With this issue, I close a chapter of my career as I pass the pen to a new editor. There is, for me, no greater honor than to have served you. I extend my gratitude to you, the thousands who have been involved in *NEQ* over the last three decades, for granting me that privilege.

—LINDA SMITH RHOADS