



**A Bell's Biography**  
Hawthorne, Nathaniel

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## **About Hawthorne:**

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born on July 4, 1804, in Salem, Massachusetts, where his birthplace is now a museum. William Hathorne, who emigrated from England in 1630, was the first of Hawthorne's ancestors to arrive in the colonies. After arriving, William persecuted Quakers. William's son John Hathorne was one of the judges who oversaw the Salem Witch Trials. (One theory is that having learned about this, the author added the "w" to his surname in his early twenties, shortly after graduating from college.) Hawthorne's father, Nathaniel Hathorne, Sr., was a sea captain who died in 1808 of yellow fever, when Hawthorne was only four years old, in Raymond, Maine. Hawthorne attended Bowdoin College at the expense of an uncle from 1821 to 1824, befriendng classmates Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and future president Franklin Pierce. While there he joined the Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity. Until the publication of his *Twice-Told Tales* in 1837, Hawthorne wrote in the comparative obscurity of what he called his "owl's nest" in the family home. As he looked back on this period of his life, he wrote: "I have not lived, but only dreamed about living." And yet it was this period of brooding and writing that had formed, as Malcolm Cowley was to describe it, "the central fact in Hawthorne's career," his "term of apprenticeship" that would eventually result in the "richly meditated fiction." Hawthorne was hired in 1839 as a weigher and gauger at the Boston Custom House. He had become engaged in the previous year to the illustrator and transcendentalist Sophia Peabody. Seeking a possible home for himself and Sophia, he joined the transcendentalist utopian community at Brook Farm in 1841; later that year, however, he left when he became dissatisfied with farming and the experiment. (His Brook Farm adventure would prove an inspiration for his novel *The Blithedale Romance*.) He married Sophia in 1842; they moved to The Old Manse in Concord, Massachusetts, where they lived for three years. There he wrote most of the tales collected in *Mosses from an Old Manse*. Hawthorne and his wife then moved to Salem and later to the Berkshires, returning in 1852 to Concord and a new home The Wayside, previously owned by the Alcotts. Their neighbors in Concord included Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Like Hawthorne, Sophia was a reclusive person. She was bedridden with headaches until her sister introduced her to Hawthorne, after which her headaches seem to have abated. The Hawthornes enjoyed a long marriage, often taking walks in the park. Sophia greatly admired her husband's work. In one of her journals, she writes: "I am always so dazzled and bewildered with

the richness, the depth, the... jewels of beauty in his productions that I am always looking forward to a second reading where I can ponder and muse and fully take in the miraculous wealth of thoughts." In 1846, Hawthorne was appointed surveyor (determining the quantity and value of imported goods) at the Salem Custom House. Like his earlier appointment to the custom house in Boston, this employment was vulnerable to the politics of the spoils system. A Democrat, Hawthorne lost this job due to the change of administration in Washington after the presidential election of 1848. Hawthorne's career as a novelist was boosted by *The Scarlet Letter* in 1850, in which the preface refers to his three-year tenure in the Custom House at Salem. *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) and *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) followed in quick succession. In 1852, he wrote the campaign biography of his old friend Franklin Pierce. With Pierce's election as president, Hawthorne was rewarded in 1853 with the position of United States consul in Liverpool. In 1857, his appointment ended and the Hawthorne family toured France and Italy. They returned to *The Wayside* in 1860, and that year saw the publication of *The Marble Faun*. Failing health (which biographer Edward Miller speculates was stomach cancer) prevented him from completing several more romances. Hawthorne died in his sleep on May 19, 1864, in Plymouth, New Hampshire while on a tour of the White Mountains with Pierce. He was buried in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, Concord, Massachusetts. Wife Sophia and daughter Una were originally buried in England. However, in June 2006, they were re-interred in plots adjacent to Nathaniel. Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorne had three children: Una, Julian, and Rose. Una was a victim of mental illness and died young. Julian moved out west, served a jail term for embezzlement and wrote a book about his father. Rose married George Parsons Lathrop and they became Roman Catholics. After George's death, Rose became a Dominican nun. She founded the Dominican Sisters of Hawthorne to care for victims of incurable cancer. Source: Wikipedia

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Hearken to our neighbor with the iron tongue. While I sit musing over my sheet of foolscap, he emphatically tells the hour, in tones loud enough for all the town to hear, though doubtless intended only as a gentle hint to myself, that I may begin his biography before the evening shall be further wasted. Unquestionably, a personage in such an elevated position, and making so great a noise in the world, has a fair claim to the services of a biographer. He is the representative and most illustrious member of that innumerable class, whose characteristic feature is the tongue, and whose sole business, to clamor for the public good. If any of his noisy brethren, in our tongue-governed democracy, be envious of the superiority which I have assigned him, they have my free consent to hang themselves as high as he. And, for his history, let not the reader apprehend an empty repetition of ding-dong-bell. He has been the passive hero of wonderful vicissitudes, with which I have chanced to become acquainted, possibly from his own mouth; while the careless multitude supposed him to be talking merely of the time of day, or calling them to dinner or to church, or bidding drowsy people go bedward, or the dead to their graves. Many a revolution has it been his fate to go through, and invariably with a prodigious uproar. And whether or no he have told me his reminiscences, this at least is true, that the more I study his deep-toned language, the more sense, and sentiment, and soul, do I discover in it.

This bell—for we may as well drop our quaint personification—is of antique French manufacture, and the symbol of the cross betokens that it was meant to be suspended in the belfry of a Romish place of worship. The old people hereabout have a tradition, that a considerable part of the metal was supplied by a brass cannon, captured in one of the victories of Louis the Fourteenth over the Spaniards, and that a Bourbon princess threw her golden crucifix into the molten mass. It is said, likewise, that a bishop baptized and blessed the bell, and prayed that a heavenly influence might mingle with its tones. When all due ceremonies had been performed, the Grand Monarque bestowed the gift—than which none could resound his beneficence more loudly—on the Jesuits, who were then converting the American Indians to the spiritual dominion of the Pope. So the bell,—our self-same bell, whose familiar voice we may hear at all hours, in the streets,—this very bell sent forth its first-born accents from the tower of a log-built chapel, westward of Lake Champlain, and near the mighty stream of the St. Lawrence. It was called Our Lady's Chapel of the Forest. The peal went forth as if to redeem and consecrate the heathen wilderness. The wolf growled at the sound, as he prowled

stealthily through the underbrush; the grim bear turned his back, and stalked sullenly away; the startled doe leaped up, and led her fawn into a deeper solitude. The red men wondered what awful voice was speaking amid the wind that roared through the tree-tops; and, following reverentially its summons, the dark-robed fathers blessed them, as they drew near the cross-crowned chapel. In a little time, there was a crucifix on every dusky bosom. The Indians knelt beneath the lowly roof, worshipping in the same forms that were observed under the vast dome of St. Peter's, when the Pope performed high mass in the presence of kneeling princes. All the religious festivals, that awoke the chiming bells of lofty cathedrals, called forth a peal from Our Lady's Chapel of the Forest. Loudly rang the bell of the wilderness while the streets of Paris echoed with rejoicings for the birthday of the Bourbon, or whenever France had triumphed on some European battle-field. And the solemn woods were saddened with a melancholy knell, as often as the thickstrewn leaves were swept away from the virgin soil, for the burial of an Indian chief.

Meantime, the bells of a hostile people and a hostile faith were ringing on Sabbaths and lecture-days, at Boston and other Puritan towns. Their echoes died away hundreds of miles southeastward of Our Lady's Chapel. But scouts had threaded the pathless desert that lay between, and, from behind the huge tree-trunks, perceived the Indians assembling at the summons of the bell. Some bore flaxen-haired scalps at their girdles, as if to lay those bloody trophies on Our Lady's altar. It was reported, and believed, all through New England, that the Pope of Rome, and the King of France, had established this little chapel in the forest, for the purpose of stirring up the red men to a crusade against the English settlers. The latter took energetic measures to secure their religion and their lives. On the eve of an especial fast of the Romish Church, while the bell tolled dismally, and the priests were chanting a doleful stave, a band of New England rangers rushed from the surrounding woods. Fierce shouts, and the report of musketry, pealed suddenly within the chapel. The ministering priests threw themselves before the altar, and were slain even on its steps. If, as antique traditions tell us, no grass will grow where the blood of martyrs has been shed, there should be a barren spot, to this very day, on the site of that desecrated altar.

While the blood was still plashing from step to step, the leader of the rangers seized a torch, and applied it to the drapery of the shrine. The flame and smoke arose, as from a burnt-sacrifice, at once illuminating and obscuring the whole interior of the chapel,—now hiding the dead priests in a sable shroud, now revealing them and their slayers in one

terrific glare. Some already wished that the altar-smoke could cover the deed from the sight of Heaven. But one of the rangers—a man of sanctified aspect, though his hands were bloody—approached the captain.

"Sir," said he, "our village meeting-house lacks a bell, and hitherto we have been fain to summon the good people to worship by beat of drum. Give me, I pray you, the bell of this popish chapel, for the sake of the godly Mr. Rogers, who doubtless hath remembered us in the prayers of the congregation, ever since we began our march. Who can tell what share of this night's good success we owe to that holy man's wrestling with the Lord?"

"Nay, then," answered the captain, "if good Mr. Rogers hath holpen our enterprise, it is right that he should share the spoil. Take the bell and welcome, Deacon Lawson, if you will be at the trouble of carrying it home. Hitherto it hath spoken nothing but papistry, and that too in the French or Indian gibberish; but I warrant me, if Mr. Rogers consecrate it anew, it will talk like a good English and Protestant bell."

So Deacon Lawson and half a score of his townsmen took down the bell, suspended it on a pole, and bore it away on their sturdy shoulders, meaning to carry it to the shore of Lake Champlain, and thence homeward by water. Far through the woods gleamed the flames of Our Lady's Chapel, flinging fantastic shadows from the clustered foliage, and glancing on brooks that had never caught the sunlight. As the rangers traversed the midnight forest, staggering under their heavy burden, the tongue of the bell gave many a tremendous stroke,—clang, clang, clang!—a most doleful sound, as if it were tolling for the slaughter of the priests and the ruin of the chapel. Little dreamed Deacon Lawson and his townsmen that it was their own funeral knell. A war-party of Indians had heard the report, of musketry, and seen the blaze of the chapel, and now were on the track of the rangers, summoned to vengeance by the bell's dismal murmurs. In the midst of a deep swamp, they made a sudden onset on the retreating foe. Good Deacon Lawson battled stoutly, but had his skull cloven by a tomahawk, and sank into the depths of the morass, with the ponderous bell above him. And, for many a year thereafter, our hero's voice was heard no more on earth, neither at the hour of worship, nor at festivals nor funerals.

And is he still buried in that unknown grave? Scarcely so, dear reader. Hark! How plainly we hear him at this moment, the spokesman of Time, proclaiming that it is nine o'clock at night! We may therefore safely conclude that some happy chance has restored him to upper air.

But there lay the bell, for many silent years; and the wonder is, that he did not lie silent there a century, or perhaps a dozen centuries, till the world should have forgotten not only his voice, but the voices of the whole brotherhood of bells. How would the first accent of his iron tongue have startled his resurrectionists! But he was not fated to be a subject of discussion among the antiquaries of far posterity. Near the close of the Old French War, a party of New England axe-men, who preceded the march of Colonel Bradstreet toward Lake Ontario, were building a bridge of logs through a swamp. Plunging down a stake, one of these pioneers felt it graze against some hard, smooth substance. He called his comrades, and, by their united efforts, the top of the bell was raised to the surface, a rope made fast to it, and thence passed over the horizontal limb of a tree. Heave ho! up they hoisted their prize, dripping with moisture, and festooned with verdant water-moss. As the base of the bell emerged from the swamp, the pioneers perceived that a skeleton was clinging with its bony fingers to the clapper, but immediately relaxing its nerveless grasp, sank back into the stagnant water. The bell then gave forth a sullen clang. No wonder that he was in haste to speak, after holding his tongue for such a length of time! The pioneers shoved the bell to and fro, thus ringing a loud and heavy peal, which echoed widely through the forest, and reached the ears of Colonel Bradstreet, and his three thousand men. The soldiers paused on their march; a feeling of religion, mingled with borne-tenderness, overpowered their rude hearts; each seemed to hear the clangor of the old church-bell, which had been familiar to him from infancy, and had tolled at the funerals of all his forefathers. By what magic had that holy sound strayed over the wide-murmuring ocean, and become audible amid the clash of arms, the loud crashing of the artillery over the rough wilderness-path, and the melancholy roar of the wind among the boughs?

The New-Englanders hid their prize in a shadowy nook, betwixt a large gray stone and the earthy roots of an overthrown tree; and when the campaign was ended, they conveyed our friend to Boston, and put him up at auction on the sidewalk of King Street. He was suspended, for the nonce, by a block and tackle, and being swung backward and forward, gave such loud and clear testimony to his own merits, that the auctioneer had no need to say a word. The highest bidder was a rich old representative from our town, who piously bestowed the bell on the meeting-house where he had been a worshipper for half a century. The good man had his reward. By a strange coincidence, the very first duty of the sexton, after the bell had been hoisted into the belfry, was to toll

the funeral knell of the donor. Soon, however, those doleful echoes were drowned by a triumphant peal for the surrender of Quebec.

Ever since that period, our hero has occupied the same elevated station, and has put in his word on all matters of public importance, civil, military, or religious. On the day when Independence was first proclaimed in the street beneath, he uttered a peal which many deemed ominous and fearful, rather than triumphant. But he has told the same story these sixty years, and none mistake his meaning now. When Washington, in the fulness of his glory, rode through our flower-strewn streets, this was the tongue that bade the Father of his Country welcome! Again the same voice was heard, when La Fayette came to gather in his half-century's harvest of gratitude. Meantime, vast changes have been going on below. His voice, which once floated over a little provincial seaport, is now reverberated between brick edifices, and strikes the ear amid the buzz and tumult of a city. On the Sabbaths of olden time, the summons of the bell was obeyed by a picturesque and varied throng; stately gentlemen in purple velvet coats, embroidered waistcoats, white wigs, and gold-laced hats, stepping with grave courtesy beside ladies in flowered satin gowns, and hoop-petticoats of majestic circumference; while behind followed a liveried slave or bondsman, bearing the psalm-book, and a stove for his mistress's feet. The commonalty, clad in homely garb, gave precedence to their betters at the door of the meetinghouse, as if admitting that there were distinctions between them, even in the sight of God. Yet, as their coffins were borne one after another through the street, the bell has tolled a requiem for all alike. What mattered it, whether or no there were a silver scutcheon on the coffin-lid? "Open thy bosom, Mother Earth!" Thus spake the bell. "Another of thy children is coming to his long rest. Take him to thy bosom, and let him slumber in peace." Thus spake the bell, and Mother Earth received her child. With the self-same tones will the present generation be ushered to the embraces of their mother; and Mother Earth will still receive her children. Is not thy tongue a-weary, mournful talker of two centuries? O funeral bell! wilt thou never be shattered with thine own melancholy strokes? Yea, and a trumpet-call shall arouse the sleepers, whom thy heavy clang could awake no more!

Again—again thy voice, reminding me that I am wasting the "midnight oil." In my lonely fantasy, I can scarce believe that other mortals have caught the sound, or that it vibrates elsewhere than in my secret soul. But to many hast thou spoken. Anxious men have heard thee on their sleepless pillows, and bethought themselves anew of to-

morrow's care. In a brief interval of wakefulness, the sons of toil have heard thee, and say, "Is so much of our quiet slumber spent?—is the morning so near at hand?" Crime has heard thee, and mutters, "Now is the very hour!" Despair answers thee, "Thus much of this weary life is gone!" The young mother, on her bed of pain and ecstasy, has counted thy echoing strokes, and dates from them her first-born's share of life and immortality. The bridegroom and the bride have listened, and feel that their night of rapture flits like a dream away. Thine accents have fallen faintly on the ear of the dying man, and warned him that, ere thou speakest again, his spirit shall have passed whither no voice of time can ever reach. Alas for the departing traveller, if thy voice—the voice of fleeting time—have taught him no lessons for Eternity!

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*The Blithedale Romance*

The principal setting is a communal farm called Blithedale (i.e., "Happy Valley"), a would-be modern Arcadia along the lines of the anti-capitalist ideals of Charles Fourier, yet is nonetheless destroyed by the self-interested behavior of some of its members.

Among those members are: Hollingsworth, a monomaniacal philanthropist and confirmed misogynist who intends to turn Blithedale into a colony for the reformation of criminals; Zenobia, a passionate feminist of exotic origin who ironically finds Hollingsworth's misogyny irresistible; Priscilla, a young and impecunious seamstress from the city; and Miles Coverdale, the unreliable narrator, a minor poet and dandy given to acts of voyeurism.

An intense friendship develops among these four during the spring and summer, but begins to disintegrate as autumn approaches and ultimately ends in tragedy.

Nathaniel Hawthorne

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*The Marble Faun*

The Marble Faun is Hawthorne's most unusual romance, and possibly one of the strangest major works of American fiction. Writing on the eve of the American Civil War, Hawthorne set his story in a fantastical Italy. The romance mixes elements of a fable, pastoral, gothic novel, and travel guide. The climax comes less than halfway through the story, and Hawthorne intentionally fails to answer many of the reader's questions about the characters and the plot.

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*The House of the Seven Gables*

In a sleepy little New England village stands a dark, weather-beaten, many-gabled house. This brooding mansion is haunted by a centuries-old curse that casts the shadow of ancestral sin upon the last four members of the distinctive Pyncheon family. Mysterious deaths threaten the living. Musty documents nestle behind hidden panels carrying the secret of the family's salvation—or its downfall.

Hawthorne called *The House of the Seven Gables* “a Romance,” and freely bestowed upon it many fascinating gothic touches. A brilliant intertwining of the popular, the symbolic, and the historical, the novel is a powerful exploration of personal and national guilt, a work that Henry James declared “the closest approach we are likely to have to the Great American Novel.”



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