



Robert E. Cray. *Lovewell's Fight: War, Death, and Memory in Borderland New England.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014. 224 pp. \$80.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-62534-106-8.

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We sometimes stumble upon the best history: a scrap or fragment that reveals an obscure or ephemeral moment, a forgotten person or place, which slowly evolves into a story of broader significance under the insight and imagination of a practiced historian. As Robert E. Cray explains in his recent monograph *Lovewell's Fight: War, Death, and Memory in Borderland New England*, the genesis for this story was in the short stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne and laudatory references to Captain John Lovewell's heroics. A preface describing the bravery and virtue of the 1725 battle left him at a loss of recall, as he learned nothing of the incident during his professional training in early American history. This led him to consider, over the course of eight years and numerous scholarly diversions, the significance of this obscure conflict far from the colonial center of Boston, as well as its afterlife and evolutionary history in the memory of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century New Englanders. Within a relatively brief monograph comprising six chapters, Cray effectively demonstrates how a small borderlands conflict, which resulted in an English rout at the end of Dummer's War, resonated with New Englanders in multiple cultural arenas. In doing so, Cray offers an insightful model for situating microhistory within major macrohistorical trends and confronting the diffi-

culties of fragmentary or contradictory archival sources.

"Lovewell's Fight" refers to Captain John Lovewell's fateful third foray into the borderlands of Dunstable, Massachusetts, to ambush Abenaki Indians for scalps as part of mercenary raiding that took place during Dummer's War. By this point Lovewell had made a name for himself as a skilled and cautious commander in the skirmishes that periodically wracked the Maine borderlands. As they ventured into Abenaki territory, Lovewell and his men apparently split his company of mercenaries into a rear and advance guard over the course of their trek to build defense works in the event of a siege. As the advanced guard moved deeper into Pigwacket Abenaki territory, they encountered a lone Indian who they quickly killed, and the company's chaplain, Reverend Jonathan Frye, scalped. The troop continued unaware into an ambush by two Indian parties, which resulted in the death of Lovewell and a number of his men. Over the course of ten hours, the combatants exchanged shots and insults, and the English survivors made the difficult decision of abandoning the dead and mortally wounded to regroup with the rear guard, which had already fled after the distant sounds of Indians in the woods ravished their

frayed nerves. A handful of survivors limped home from the ambush to give accounts of what proved to be the last skirmish of Dummer's War, a largely regional conflict sandwiched between more famous imperial wars between Britain and France. Today Lovewell's Fight is a passing footnote in the history of Maine, a victim of historical forgetfulness. Or is it? Cray argues that Lovewell's heroics were quickly mythologized and became an enduring part of New England's regional historical memory, as the event intersected with ideas about borderlands conflicts, dying and proper burials, social welfare for widows and wounded soldiers, and both history writing and memory making. Many New Englanders found Lovewell's Fight to be an effective vehicle for advancing their ideas and agendas, crafting narratives of the conflict or recalling a connection to Lovewell as it suited their respective needs.

Cray first considers Lovewell's tactics and previous experiences in borderlands fighting from a military perspective to attempt a description of what likely happened in the ambush and to situate Lovewell's death within the larger history of Dummer's War. As he ably shows throughout the course of *Lovewell's Fight*, conflicting information and ideological slants problematize the earliest sources of the event, making it necessary to assiduously compare accounts against each other and frame the third expedition in the context of Lovewell's previous experience. As a rule, Lovewell proved to be a cautious and conscientious commander who tended to the wounds of his men and adjusted his tactics accordingly, which resulted in two successful raids that produced no casualties. This raises the important question of what went awry during his final excursion: early chroniclers of Lovewell tended to blame his men and their thirst for scalps. To New England ministers, this also made the survivors' decision to leave the dead and wounded even more egregious in light of Lovewell's previous heroism. In the end, the slaughter of Lovewell and his men was no turning point in the larger context of Dummer's War despite the fact that the battle

took the life of the notorious Abenaki warrior Paugus: the war was largely over by that point and the Abenaki were slowly losing ground to acquisitive white settlers. In the next chapter, Cray considers the reasons behind the staying power of Lovewell's Fight in the historical memory of New England's borderlands residents.

Cray situates the borderlands history of Lovewell's hometown of Dunstable in the larger context of Indian wars to account for the lacunae of sources surrounding his youth. While the notion of scalping is as unsettling today as it was for Henry David Thoreau when he considered Lovewell's actions, Cray explains the evolution of borderlands warfare from King Philip's War onward in the colonies, noting the growing brutality of small-scale fighting and the impact that this had in setting borderlands communities like Dunstable on edge. That Dunstable survived the periodic bouts of growth and shrinkage which accompanied the ebb and flow of imperial wars is impressive in its own right. Regional stories of scalping and English heroics also circulated in the form of Hannah Dunston's grisly account of Indian capture and the bloody revenge she meted out on her captives. This story was particularly relevant because Dunston supposedly visited Dunstable while Lovewell was a youth, so this account and the realities of growing up in a community where Abenaki neighbors were grudgingly accepted or reviled depending on the barometer of imperial geopolitics likely shaped his youth. Cray also asserts that the transition to regular government payouts for scalps formed "a new kind of mobile warfare based on subcontracting," which created "an economical means of raising troopers to fight a particularly nasty type of war" (p. 46). Though Lovewell grew up in a family of moderate standing, his lack of political clout probably drew him into the business of borderlands warfare as scalping bounties and a rank of "captain" with the potential to rise in rank served as a means of social advancement.

Two other chapters consider the interrelated topics of death and the survivors of war in the context of Lovewell's defeat. The initial account of the battle crafted by the Reverend Thomas Symmes condemned Lovewell's men for abandoning their commander and comrades to their Pigwacket enemies and called on the colony to launch an expedition to properly recover and bury the men. The chapter considers how Bostonians received and interpreted news of wartime casualties from borderlands fights within the domain of funerary culture and ritual. As the growing transatlantic economy led Bostonians to develop increasingly formalized and expensive funerary practices, the ignominy of missing wartime corpses and scandalous accounts of disfigurement and dismemberment at the hands of enemy Indians frequently added to colonial rancor. Cray also draws an appropriate parallel to similar English practices meted out against criminals and pirates to demonstrate the political and spiritual dimension of colonial bodies. As tales of Lovewell's heroics evolved, he served as a template for proper English conduct and composure in the face of insurmountable odds. Death also complicated the lives of the widows and families who lost their husbands to borderlands fighting, which leads Cray to consider the immediacy of Lovewell's Fight in the minds of families tied to the conflict. Cray aptly combines social history methodology with the insight of cultural history by locating the petitions widows and survivors offered to colonial governors for extended death benefits and aid, reading these documents for the methods of narrative framing their authors used to highlight the heroic behavior of their loved ones (even if they were peripherally involved in the fight) and to capitalize on the moral imperative of their need. Here Cray takes especially careful notice of the ways in which historical narratives evolve and change to suit the needs and agency of petitioners and the varied resulting payouts to widows and survivors. Eventually the entire company and their living beneficiaries received land in Abenaki territory encompassing the

very site of the battle, a broad payout in land that paved over the conflicting issues of memory and accusations of cowardice surrounding the rear guard and Benjamin Hassell.

Chapters entitled "Scripting the Fight" and "Remembering Lovewell through the Centuries" confront the issue of historical memory from the vantage points of the immediate aftermath of Lovewell's Fight and in the resulting centuries. "Scripting the Fight" considers the two earliest accounts of the battle, one authored by Reverend Symmes and the other by Samuel Penhallow. The homiletic produced by Symmes served as a moral jeremiad for the colony, as he rebuked members of the company for their failure in abandoning their fallen brethren and conspicuously omitted mention of Hassell for his extreme cowardice, a narrative template later chroniclers would follow. Symmes also attempted to rally his countrymen with scriptural allusions to Saul and Jonathan, and, in the second edition, the more successful Joshua. In comparing the Symmes text to Penhallow's, Cray considers the firsthand accounts which possibly informed their writing as well as the substantial discrepancies between the accounts. In the end, what emerged from their respective efforts was a story of borderlands heroics that colonists could take pride in, regardless of any factual errors or exaggerations. Unfortunately for Lovewell and his men, the long-term history of the region was not so kind to their memory. As colonists became revolutionaries, and then republican citizens, the memory of older borderlands conflicts gave way to more recent accounts of Lexington and Concord, and fear of Indians gave way as the borderlands receded beyond Dunstable. In this chapter, Cray traces the literary history of Lovewell's Fight in published ballads and stories by notable American luminaries, such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Henry David Thoreau, and Francis Parkman. Of similar importance is the general history of the town that developed in close proximity to the battle site: present-day Fryeburg, Maine. The most interesting aspect of this chapter,

which Cray insightfully recognizes, is the warring cultural memory surrounding borderlands conflicts and the place of the diminishing Abenaki Indians. The grisly details of borderlands warfare clashed with the morals of New Englanders in the nineteenth century, as early as the time of Thoreau's writing. Was it really heroic for a party of thirty-four mercenaries to fall upon a lone Indian for his scalp? Were Lovewell and his men worth celebrating in a more enlightened day? Perhaps the past should claim some of New England's colonial history so that the country could forget. It is telling that the town of Fryeburg eventually entered history for its association with Daniel Webster rather than John Lovewell. Even more telling is the shift in memory and conscience which later prompted Fryeburg residents to honor the valor of the fallen Abenaki as well as the colonial troop when the battle site finally received a bronze plaque commemorating the event. Perhaps the Abenaki could claim a victory, however slight, after more than a century of honoring English losers.

For advanced undergraduate courses in colonial history, the topical nature of Cray's chapters would best serve to ground lectures and discussions in borderlands conflicts, issues of death and wartime aid to wounded soldiers and widows, center-periphery dynamics within the colonies as well as the broader imperial world, the textual construction of primary sources and histories, and the politics of memory that often accompany historic sites. Similarly, graduate-level discussions would benefit primarily from the example set by Cray's judicious methodology in framing each chapter and the close reading given to limited and conflicting primary sources, which grounds a complicated and small-scale event within wider issues of colonial history. Historiographically, *Lovewell's Fight* is part of a growing body of literature that emphasizes the conflicts that erupted in the tense atmosphere of borderlands communities like Dunstable. As such, it serves as a localized case in line with the wider phenomena described in Patrick Griffin's *American Leviathan: Empire, Nation and Revolu-*

tionary Frontier (2007) and Peter Silver's *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (2008). Material and mnemonic tension also accompanied the religious tensions in the Maine borderlands explored by Laura M. Chmielewski in *The Spice of Popery: Converging Christianities on an Early American Frontier* (2012). To Cray, the environs of Dunstable simmered with distrust and hostility: the antithesis of Richard White's *pays d'en haut* and the substantial body of colonial monographs devoted to cross-cultural accommodation.

To conclude, Cray aptly delivers what he initially intended to do: explaining Lovewell's Fight and the reasons why this obscure coda to Dummer's War and the meaning New England constructed atop the event in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It also grounds the death of Lovewell and his men in its immediate context for the widows and surviving soldiers, offering great insight into the aftermath of war and the ways in which survivors reflected on and harnessed patriotic sentiments to meet their needs. *Lovewell's Fight* manages to capture much more than this by also contextualizing the conflict within the larger history of colonial Massachusetts and the Maine borderlands and by scrutinizing the evolution of historical memory in the immediate aftermath of the skirmish through the present day. Understanding this evolution helps to better explain the rare occasions where history honors the losers and recasts bitter defeat as heroic through selective textual construction and representation, and how changing cultural imperatives abandon some things to historical amnesia.

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