

Concordia University,  
Loyola Campus,  
Hingston Hall, Room 408  
7141 Sherbrooke Street, West,  
Montreal, Quebec,  
December 13, 1976

Mr. T. Raddall,  
Liverpool, Nova Scotia

Dear Sir,

I am an honours history student at Loyola Campus of Concordia University in Montreal. I am presently doing research on the life of Lord Horatio Nelson (1758-1805). I have read several biographies and they all mention the fact that Nelson spent some time in North America in 1782.

On July 2, 1782 Nelson spent forty-eight hours in Quebec City after a convoy trip to the Isle of Bic in the St. Lawrence River. Nelson and his crew spent the summer of 1782 in the Boston-Cape Cod area as part of the British presence there in the final days of the American Revolutionary War. He and his crew contracted scurvy early in September and were sent to Quebec City to recover.

On September 17 the Albemarle arrived in Quebec City. Nelson soon recovered and during his visit he fell madly in love with a young girl by the name of Mary "Diana" Simpson. Nelson was willing to give up his military career to marry her but duty called and Alexander Davison made sure that the young captain did not commit what was thought to be an imprudent act. Nelson and his crew left Quebec on October 20. He had other romantic affairs afterwards; the most notable being with Lady Hamilton.

There is another interesting story relating to Nelson's visit to Canada. During 1782 Nelson escorted convoys in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and off the shores of Cape Breton, Canso and Halifax where American privateers were not only attacking British ships and attacking the settlement of Lunenburg. There is physical evidence that Nelson set foot ashore on Cape Breton Island, perchance to worship while his ship lay at anchor in Sydney Harbour. This is in the form of a chair, which holds a place of honour in St. George's Church in Sydney and which, according to firm tradition, was personally presented to the church by Nelson. Searches for documentary evidence to support the tradition have been unavailing but this does not necessarily mean that it is without foundation (refer to Crowsnest, October, 1955).

I have been able to find some information on Nelson's romance with Simpson. It is interesting to note that there are many errors concerning this romance. With respect to the second story, I have not been able to find out anything. Would you know of any people or sources that I could verify so as to strengthen my research? Any information or comments would be gratefully appreciated.

Thanking you in advance for your attention, effort and kindness with respect to my project, I remain

Yours sincerely,

*Edward A. Collister*

Edward A. Collister

December 21, 1976

Mr. Edward A. Collister,  
Concordia University,  
Montreal, Quebec.

Dear Mr. Collister:

I have read a good deal about Nelson, and to my mind the best biography is still that of Carola Oman, whose American publishers (Doubleday) brought it out in New York in 1946. Like you I have been much interested in Nelson's visits to Canada in HMS Albemarle, and Oman gives a very good account in pages 44-47.

I doubt very much the authenticity of the so-called "Nelson chair" in a church at Sydney N.S. There is no record of it, indeed Nelson seems to have deliberately avoided putting in to any Nova Scotia port, even when he needed reprovisioning.

Nelson arrived at Quebec for the first time on July 2, 1782, and within 48 hours he was off to take up his allotted station off Cape Cod, Massachusetts. There was no time to put in to Sydney, for by July 14 he was on his beat between Cape Cod and Boston Bay, where he seized the American schooner "Harmony" of Plymouth. The schooner's owner and skipper, Nathaniel Carver, performed good service to Nelson as a pilot for the approach to Boston Bay, and as a reward Nelson released his ship and gave him a signed certificate to protect him from further capture.

Nelson remained on his cruising station between Cape Cod and Boston until mid-September, when a steady diet of salt beef for many weeks had created scurvy in his crew. At this point Nathaniel Carver turned up in the "Harmony" again, this time with a few live sheep and fowls, and some fresh greens. It was not enough for a frigate's crew, however, and Nelson had to leave his station at last. He could easily have put in to Halifax for reprovisioning but again he did not stop anywhere until he reached Quebec. There he stayed a month, and fell in love with "Fair Canada" and Mary Simpson, as you know.

When he left on October 20 he was convoying a number of transports to New York, where he arrived on November 11. Again there was no time or reason to put in to Sydney N.S., especially with a lot of cumbersome transports.

The certificate to Nathaniel Carver, drawn up by HMS Albemarle's purser or "writer", bears the free-flowing signature of Nelson before he lost his right arm. In the course of time it passed through various hands in Plymouth, Massachusetts, and came into the possession of the White family there. A Loyalist member of that family, Captain Gideon White,

removed to Nova Scotia and was one of the founders of Shelburne N.S. For decades after the Revolution there were friendly family visits back and forth, and eventually the Nelson document came to Nova Scotia.

Many years ago I saw it in the home of T. Howland White, a descendant of Gideon, and persuaded him to present it to the Public Archives of Nova Scotia. It remains there, framed, on the wall of the reading room. It has been examined by experts from Britain's Maritime Museum, which has a large collection of Nelson documents and relics, and they pronounced it genuine.

I wrote to Carola Oman, telling her where the Carver certificate was. In her research she had lost track of it in 1848.

Sincerely,