

Nathaniel Hawthorne Biography

Author Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864) wrote novels *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of Seven Gables*, and the short story "Young Goodman Brown," among others.

Synopsis

Born in Salem, Massachusetts in 1804, Nathaniel Hawthorne's short stories include "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" (1832), "Roger Malvin's Burial" (1832), "Young Goodman Brown" (1835), and the collection *Twice-Told Tales*. He is best known for his novels *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851). His use of allegory and symbolism make Hawthorne one of the most studied writers.

Ancestral Heritage

Born on July 4, 1804, in Salem Massachusetts, Nathaniel Hawthorne's life was steeped in the Puritan legacy. An early ancestor, William Hathorne, first emigrated from England to America in 1630 and settled in Salem, Massachusetts, where he became a judge known for his harsh sentencing. William's son, John Hathorne, was one of three judges during the Salem Witch Trials in the 1690s. Nathaniel later added a "w" to his name to distance himself from this side of the family.

Early Life

Nathaniel was the only son of Nathaniel and Elizabeth Clark Hathorne (Manning). His father, a sea captain, died in 1808 of yellow fever while at sea. The family was left with meager financial support and moved in with Elizabeth's wealthy brothers. A leg injury at an early age left Nathaniel immobile for a several months during which time he developed a voracious appetite for reading and set his sights on becoming a writer.

With the aid of his wealthy uncles, young Hawthorne attended Bowdoin College from 1821 to 1825. There he met and befriended Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and future president Franklin Pierce. By his own admission, he was a negligent student with little appetite for study.

Early Works

While attending college, Nathaniel Hawthorne missed his mother and two sisters terribly and upon graduation, returned home for a 12-year stay. During this time, he began to write with purpose and soon found his "voice" self-publishing several stories, among them *The Hollow of the Three Hills* and *An Old Woman's Tale*. By 1832, he had written *My Kinsman, Major Molineux* and *Roger Malvin's Burial*, two of his greatest tales and in 1837, *Twice Told Tales*. Though his writing brought him some notoriety, it didn't provide a dependable income and for a time he worked for the Boston Custom House weighing and gaging salt and coal.

Budding Success and Marriage

Nathaniel Hawthorne ended his self-imposed seclusion at home about the same time he met Sophia Peabody, a painter, illustrator, and transcendentalist. During their courtship, Hawthorne spent some time at the Brook Farm community where he got to know Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. He didn't find transcendentalism to his favor but living in the commune allowed him to save money for his impending marriage to Sophia. After a long courtship, partially prolonged by Sophia's poor health, the

couple were married on July 9, 1842. They quickly settled in Concord, Massachusetts, and rented Old Manse, owned by Ralph Waldo Emerson. In 1844, their first of three children was born.

With mounting debt and a growing family, Hawthorne moved to Salem. A life-long Democrat, political connections helped him land a job as surveyor in the Salem Custom House in 1846, providing his family some needed financial security. However, when Whig President Zachary Taylor was elected, Hawthorne lost his appointment to political favoritism. The dismissal turned into a blessing giving him time to write his masterpiece, *The Scarlet Letter*, the story of two lovers who clashed with Puritan moral law. The book was one of the first mass-produced publications in the United States and its wide distribution made Hawthorne famous.

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Years Abroad

During the 1852 election, Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote a campaign biography for his college friend Franklin Pierce. When Pierce was elected president, he appointed Hawthorne an American Consul to Britain as a reward. The Hawthorne's stayed in England from 1853-1857. This period served as inspiration for Hawthorne's novel *Our Old Home*.

After serving as consul, Nathaniel Hawthorne took his family on an extended vacation to Italy and then back to England. In 1860, he finished his last novel *The Marble Faun*. That same year Hawthorne moved his family back to the United States and took permanent residence at The Wayside in Concord, Massachusetts.

Final Years

After 1860, it was becoming apparent that Hawthorne was moving past his prime. Striving to rekindle his earlier productivity, he found little success. Drafts were mostly incoherent and left unfinished. Some even showed signs of psychic regression. His health began to fail and he seemed to age considerably, hair turning white and experiencing slowness of thought. For months, he refused to seek medical help and died in his sleep on May 19, 1864, at Plymouth New Hampshire.