

THE MEANS MASSACRE

An Ulster-Scots story on the Maine Coast

The year was 1756. Thomas Means, his pregnant wife and three children were building a homestead on the Coast of Maine. Their cabin, with eight cleared acres was nestled on Flying Point in what is now the town of Freeport. They were one of many so-called “Scots-Irish” families that were settling in Maine. Some 250,00-400,000 immigrants from the predominantly Scottish Ulster Plantation in what is now Northern Ireland came to the American colonies prior to the American Revolutionary War. Some 2600 of them came to Massachusetts between 1717 and 1720. Many settled in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and along the coast and rivers of Maine. These new arrivals were called “Scotch-Irish” or just “Irish by the other American colonists. Today they are more appropriately referred to as Ulster-Scots.

Scots had been encouraged to settle in Ulster plantation in the 1600’s. They had created there a colony of Protestant faithful and had earned a reputation for self-sufficiency and for holding their new homeland at all costs against the so called “wild Irish” and the armies of King James during the Williamite wars.

Famine, high rents, disease, economic depression and religious persecution in the early 1700’s led thousands of Ulster Scots to see America as the next great opportunity to improve their lives and escape the endless cycle of rent wracking by absentee landlords. The American colonies at that time had experienced decades of warfare with the French and Indians. Leaders of the Congregational Churches of New England and various proprietors of large land tracts saw the Ulster-Scots desire to relocate as an opportunity to be used to their advantage. The homesteading skills of the Ulster-Scots could be used to settle and develop wilderness lands increasing land values for the proprietors. Protestant homesteaders moving into wilderness areas surrounding New England population centers was seen to benefit the Church by buffering their parishioners homes and lives from Indian raids. It would also strengthen the English claim to northern lands against the French. Church leaders and land proprietors sought and attracted thousands of Ulster-Scots to the Maine coast. During this time stories of massacres and abductions of homesteaders by Indians were common. Bounties were paid by the French for “English” scalps. Prisoners were sold for slave labor in French Canada. Stories of such events were made popular in the mid to late 1800’s by authors such as Charles P. Isley and Elijah Kellogg. The influence

Ulster- Scots had on America has been more recently documented by James Webb's *Born Fighting: How the Scots-Irish shaped America*.

The hardships and triumphs of Ulster-Scots in Maine are exemplified by the Means family. Thomas Means (a second generation American of Ulster-Scot parents) his wife Alice, two daughters, Alice and Jane, a 16 month old son Robert, a hired man, Martin, and Means sister in law, Molly Phinney, were residing at their new cabin on Flying Point. An Ulster-Scot neighbor from Harpswell came and warned the Ulster-Scot settlement at Flying Point of a nearby Indian raiding party. The neighboring Anderson family had built a garrison or block-house for protection during such times and Anderson had a reputation as a noted Indian fighter. The Means opted to stay one more night at their cabin before moving into the blockhouse. During the small hours of the night the bolted door of their cabin was broken down and Mr. Means was dragged from his cabin, shot and scalped. Mrs. Means in trying to help was shot in the breast and the infant Robert, whom she carried in her arms, was killed by the bullet. The daughter Alice and her Aunt Mollie were captured. Jane escaped by hiding in the ash-pot or (ash-pit) and avoided discovery. Martin at this point managed to shoot one of the Indians from the cabin loft whereby young Alice was able to escape into the darkness and bushes of a gulley behind the cabin. The Indians retreated taking Mollie Phinney and Thomas Means scalp with them. Mollie was taken to Quebec and sold to a Frenchman for whom she worked as a domestic laborer. She was found and rescued by a Captain McClellan of Falmouth and the two were later married. Mrs. Means survived and bore a son, Thomas Means, Jr., six months after the massacre. Thomas Means, Jr. went on to become a Major in General Washington's army and served in various campaigns throughout the war. He returned to become an official of the new town of Freeport and a noted businessman. It is suspected by many that he took revenge against an Indian claiming to have been a part of the raid many years later and buried him in the basement of his tavern on Main Street in Freeport.

The story of the Means family is representative in many respects of the larger story of the Ulster-Scots or Scots-Irish in Maine and New England. I believe the Scot's story of emigration to Maine and their influence on Maine and the new American nation have been much overlooked and under reported. The Saint Andrews Society of Maine has a great opportunity to collect and share these remarkable stories. I invite any readers who have collections of family stories or documents that shed light on the history of Scots in Maine and New England to contact the Society or this author. Let's commemorate the upcoming 250th anniversary of the Means Massacre by ensuring that our Scottish American heritage is not lost or forgotten.