CLASS DISTINCTIONS


This book, a detailed exploration of the settlement of Maine during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, illuminated the violent and widespread contest along the American frontier that served to define and complete the American Revolution. Calling themselves Liberty Men or White Indians, Maine’s militant settlers organized secret companies of armed and disguised men to defend their populist understanding of the Revolution. They acted to protect their new farms from the legal claims of the Great Proprietors – wealthy and powerful land speculators who meant to limit the Revolution. At issue was the distribution of property and power in the new but rapidly expanding American republic. (From the book’s back cover)

INTRODUCTION

Equality of property is the life of a Republican government; destroy that equality and the principles of the government will be wholly corrupted, while the form remains a cloak for oppression and tyranny. Those people who are acquainted with the settlement of the eastern country, can bear witness to the evils arising from the large patents, grants, and Indian deeds in these parts; and I trust from a sense of duty to generations yet unborn will be vigilant to spress the progress of that Hydra.

“Scribble Scrabbble,” *Cumberland Gazette 1786*

1. ORIGINS OF THE CONFLICT

You must remember in the first place, that the eastward country (as it is called) has been Settled in a very illegal manner. It has been the practice to give the settlers a hundred acres of land for settling, after they have been quarreled with and irritated a long time and this has learn’t their neighbours to snarl and mutter at the proprietors.

-- Elisha Sylvester of Greene -- January 19, 1801

No part of the United States affords such solid grounds of profit to capitalists, as the District of Maine.

-- General Henry Knox, November 11, 1795
2. THE GREAT PROPRIETORS

Mildness ever beamed in his countenance . . . and equity and generosity always marked his intercourse with his fellow-men. The poor, he never oppressed; the more obscure citizen, I believe could never complain of injustice at his hands. With all classes of people, he dwelt on the most fair and honorable principles; and would sooner submit to a sacrifice of property himself, than injure or defraud another.

-- Reverend Alden Bradford’s funeral sermon for Henry Knox, November 2, 1806.

We resolve that there is on this land claimed by Knox above seven hundred children in our judgment, which never had a shoe or stocking to wear from the womb to nine years of age, but their extreme poverty is no defense against an abusive cruel nabob who is continually crying pay me for my land or I will drive you from your bark huts. -- Davistown Resolves, 1796

3. THE SETTLERS

Let us your Properties explain;
Your Loggin Houses stopping Rain;
The fruitless scheming, and the Toil;
Your Fire won’t Roast, nor Water Boil.
Thro’ all your Forests Hills and Plains,
The Goddess Want, in Triumph reigns;
And her chief Officers of State
Sloth Dirt and Theft, around her wait.
Your Court is such a partial Whore,
To spare the Rich, and plague the Poor.

If these of all Crimes are the worst,
What Place was ever half so curst?
When tired by day attending Law,
At Night when we together draw,
There’s neither Feathers, Chaff, nor Straw,
Whereon to lay a weary Head,
Not one in Ten, can get a Bed.

-- Gersham Flagg,
On the Kennebeck Proprietors, 1767
4. LIBERTY MEN

*The cry of the two counties of Lincoln and Hancock is Liberty! Liberty!*

Court: Who is it that cries for liberty?
People: It is the peasants.
Court: There is no liberty for you, return to a sense of duty or you shall fall under irretrievable ruin, you and your families, we will chain you to your oars.
People: What, are we in Algiers?
Court: You shall presently see where you are, we will send our armies and destroy you.
People: Why, what have we done?
Court: You have rebelled against our laws!
People: Your laws! Have you made laws to play pranks with them, for traps and snares to catch men that are seeking after liberty?
Court: There is no liberty for you; it is we that have the power, that have the liberty.

– Samuel Ely, 1797

5. SEEKERS AND PREACHERS

Ignorant, wandering, and unprincipled preachers . . . too lazy to labor, and therefore hopeless of any other than a wretched subsistence in their own proper spheres, often blown up with spiritual pride, believing themselves as peculiar favorites to receive immediate communications from heaven, assume the character and employment of religious teachers. The precarious pittance furnished by thus business, miserable as it is, they consider as better than starving at home.

The Reverend Timothy Dwight – President of Yale - Congregationalist, 1808

The only persons who opposed [the revival] were GPG and MAGOG, viz. the enemies of Liberty and Equality; or in more explicit terms, the Drones of Society, i.e. the persons who wish to live wholly on the earnings of others. These were very much opposed to the reformation.

They called it *delusion, enthusiasm.*

– John Buzell, Freewill Baptist elder, 1811

6. LEADING MEN
Another evil... is found in the character and influence of many of those who are considered as principal men in every newly settled country... Those who acquire this influence are in many instances both ignorant and licentious. It is, therefore, frequently exerted in favor of loose principles and practices, and against those which are better. -- Timothy Dwight

7. WHITE INDIANS

The most prominent feature in their character is a violent and implacable hatred to the law... They threaten, they prophesy. The sheriff of the county and his officers they have marked out and doomed as victims for sacrifice and the hatred name of execution is to terrify them no more. They declare the profession of law must come down, that lawyers must be extirpated and their offices prostrated with the dust. The court house they say must fall and the gaol share a similar fate.

– Lemuel Paine, Winslow lawyer, February 1808

8. THE JEFFERSONIANS

He that gives to the rich shall surely come to want; and another text should follow, As the partridge setteth on eggs and hatchet them not, so he that getteth riches and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end he shall be a fool. - Samuel Ely, 1797

[William King’s] Bingham land was a source of trouble and expense; he derived no benefit from the conveyances to him, and the taxes and costs consumed his property, perplexing contention with town officials and trespassers drove him to insanity, so that he was placed under a guardian the last years of his life... and is estate was insolvent.

– William Allen, Jr. 1876

9. THE AFTERMATH OF RESISTANCE

[The Great Proprietors] ought never to have had a foot of soil on this side of the Atlantic Ocean. But alas! Justice does not always take place. Therefore, and honest man may be supplanted by a rogue from off his farm because power seems to give him right so to do or the Supreme [Judicial] Court may have guaranteed those rights which it seems at a future period never ought
to have been given to such men, men in whose breast the cause of freedom and independence as it respects the United States never found a residence. – James Robinson, Jr. 1820

[Moses Little and Josiah Little] were fine business men, broad-minded, energetic, and …, much of the success in establishing proprietors’ and settlers’ claims was attributable to them, through wise efficient counsel and square dealing; and many of the earlier settlers of Greene have much to thank them, for. – Walter Lindley Mower, town historian, 1938

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Late 1600’s –

Key concepts: Settlement, character, topography, masts, Masssachusetts Bay Coloony, defense

The places beyond Sagadahoc were given to his Royall Highness by his Majesty. Yet as Col. Nichols desired who could not attend to go himself, wee have appointed some to governe them for the present, as there was great need. Upon 3 rivers, the East of Kenebeck, Shipscot, & Pemaquid there are 3 plantations, the greatest hath not above 20 houses, & they are inhabited by the worst of men: They have had hitherto no governm' & are made up of such as to avoid paying of febts, & being punished have fled hither; For the most part they are fisher-men, & share in their wives as they do, in their boats. Wee were upwithin Piscataquay river July 9th when we received his Majesties Itre of January 28th. Ther being an excellent harbor larg & safe, and 7 or 8 ships in it, a great store of Masts, we sent warrants ato 4 towns upon that river, with an intent to have gotte that harbor fortified by them; But the Massachusetts sent a prohibition to them & a letter to us, by their Marshall, which put a stop to our endeavours. This place we think deserves fortifying as much as any place in New England. – Source ???

2017

Key concepts – Harpswell, natives vs folks from away, Wallace Shore Road

Cultures clash on Harpswell waterfront, and in court: . . . What Moody calls commercial activity, Mason claims is a repeated display of physical and psychological encroachment on her
space and well-being – that his actions demonstrate a history of disturbing the peace on the road. For a while, their feud played out as neighborly friction, or in the local code office. But now it is the stereotypical culture clash, between those who come to Maine to live on the waterfront and those who have historically made their living here . . . "We’re not part of the martini club, as I call it," he said in July. "And I don’t intend to (be). That’s our access," he said of the shoreline.

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