



COLLECTIONS OF THE MAINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
(This picture is from Deborah Bosma)

THIRD SERIES, VOL. I

PORTLAND PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETY

1904

406 MAINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
THE LAST TRAGEDY OF THE INDIAN WARS:

THE PREBLE MASSACRE AT THE KENNEBEC

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Read before the Maine Historical Society April 90, 1903

Our historian Bancroft, remarking upon the terrible wars of the red men, prosecuted usually by warrior bands rarely exceeding forty, adds that "parties of six or seven were most to be dreaded, while those of two or three were not uncommon." Stealthy steps upon the enemy's trail to strike them when asleep; the ambush of a village; the dash upon a single foe-man or upon a woman and children; the quick taking of scalps and flight; were characteristic methods.

In the same way later upon the white man did the Indian make; war when his bloodthirsty nature sought victims or his hate and fears would expel the intruding settler.

Our New England history shows instances where war parties of several hundreds assaulted settlements as at Dover and Wells, but in a majority of such cases Frenchmen doubled "the savage horde and French leaders and French tactics aided in a more woeful work as at Deerfield, Berwick, Casco, Pemaquid. But in those same wars the great number of desolations and atrocities came from bands of ten or a score. In the last twenty years of the Indian warfare- 1740-60 - when settlements had been extended and were stronger, the main work of the harassing foe was done on the outskirts, by ambush of laborers, a fell swoop upon a lonely dwelling. These murderous raids were better executed by wolf-like bands of five or ten.

"War," wrote Edmund Burke, "is the matter which fills all history." Our Maine history is not complete without many pages of deeds over which humanity must weep. The instance I relate was the first of the Kennebec tales of blood which engaged my attention, and had special significance because it occurred a mile from my home for many years and the descendants of the victims were my neighbors and intimate friends. To family traditions I was afterwards able to add documentary evidence from the Massachusetts State papers.

Upon Ebenezer Preble fell the sudden deadly onset of skulking raiders of the Kennebec valley.

He was the son of Jonathan, of Arrowsic, who was grandson of Abraham, the immigrant to Scituate and thence to York, about 1642. Hence he was a second cousin of General Jedediah Preble whom Portland holds in honor. For the times, middle of the eighteenth century, this young man of thirty-four had made a happy beginning in life. A farm, a humble dwelling sheltering a wife and six children, cultivated acres near at hand, a barn partly built, fair prospects for the onward years, were solid foundations for true satisfaction. His home was on a small plateau jutting upon the tides and eddies of the river, and now opposite to the northerly part of the city of Bath.

At work in his corn-plat on a day of early June, the ambushed foe sped their deadly missiles upon him, and he fell under the careful certainty of aim. The report of guns like thunder from a clear sky sent a shock of terror into his dwelling. Did not every wife and mother - carry an aching fear of similar peril every day? Mrs. Preble knew full well the meaning of those guns. She hastily barred the door and, unwisely it seems, made such- defense as she could against the fierce enemy who at once yelled their joy and defiance about the house. It was a party of four only, ranging from Canada into Maine for scalps and captives.

They preferred captives to scalps because of the higher price in the French markets of the spoils of war. They strove for entrance and demanded surrender, offering "good quarters." Failing of this, they tried bullets. One account told that Mrs. Preble was putting a featherbed against the door for more effective barricade against the guns. Through crevice or aperture by door or window she was shot dead, falling in the midst of her shrieking children, while grievous wounds were inflicted on two more of the household.

Now dire fright and hopelessness compelled to unbar the door. The assailants. took possession, gleeful certainly at success. and the numerous captives which meant much silver in hand at Quebec. . They hastily gathered such plunder as they would be able to carry: of it one portion was the mass of dough for the rye-and-Indian loaf, in preparation by Mrs. Preble's hands. This was slipped out of the tray into a blanket, greedily to be devoured later, or divided to the captives. Probably the whole transaction did not occupy an hour from the ambushed shot till the march began. The Indian file-leader led on the distressed company into the great wilderness through which Arnold and his men toiled and suffered six score years later. Now four exultant savages convoyed a company of eight horror-stricken youth and children.

It was fortunate that only nine months previously record of this family was entered at Georgetown by Clerk Samuel Denny. The ages were approximately: Rebecca, twelve and one-half years; Samuel, ten; Mehetabel, eight and one-half;

Ebenezer, six; Mary, three and one-half; also an infant, William, three months. There was also a servant girl, Sarah Fling, seventeen years of age, and an undersized boy nearly fifteen, Simeon Girdey, a lad in the service of Jonathan Preble.

The girl, Sarah Fling, suffered a slight wound; the lad one grievous and mortal. A tradition told that the Indians endeavored to save his life, probing the wound for the bullet. We know that in the end he was knocked on the head.

Family tradition retained few incidents of the dolorous journey. The Indians made hasty departure, taking a detour back from the river into the forest for greater safety if their horrid work should at once be discovered. At the first resting-place but a few miles onward, the oldest daughter was confident she could have escaped, but loyally would not forsake her sisters. The little Mary in fits of crying was threatened into silence by her captors and was also carried on the back of her oldest sister much of the way. The undiscerning Indians, in desire to save the infant's life, assumed that the stout servant girl might nourish it at her breast, and so directed. She could only deny and protest "I am" not it's mother." Then in their disappointment and exasperation the little one was recklessly and viciously brained against the nearest rock or tree. The family tradition holds that this fiendish deed was done before the eyes of the horrified group.

The captives were as kindly treated as life in the wilderness would allow; received the choicest bits of game killed; were watched over with care, for if there was no compassion self-interest so enjoined that the larger revenue of their exploit should be secured by living captives than by scalps.

On the way the captors hailed another party and held aloft on a pole the bunch or scalps, exulting in the trophies of a successful raid: the bereaved girls held long in memory the excruciating view of the long, black hair of their mother, waving as a token of orphanage cruelly thrust upon them "in a moment and their wretched and then hopeless fate as they were driven into the land of the enemy and the stranger.

The situation of the house still used for many years was well known in recent times as it had stood on the south side of the plateau on the border of a little cove. It disappeared, however, by the encroachment of brick-making, which ate away the supporting river bank. The outline of stones forming evidently the foundations of the barn can now be traced.

From that wrecked and blood-stained home the scarred bodies of the murdered parents were taken up river a mile to the block-house of Captain Harnden, who was Mrs. Preble's father, at the present village of West Woolwich, and there close by received sorrowful burial. A slight mound bordered by rough stones amid later graves is now plainly defined, remaining a memorial of the tragic event, and sadly needing some monument in their memory who were the victims of the last raid and massacre of the Kennebec valley.

Too late! often a poignant phrase, must have been a sharp thorn in Captain Harnden's heart if, as was told, he intended in view of peril to take his daughter and family home a day later when planting should be done. It seems desirable in behalf of the accuracy of history to refer to what existing history contains concerning this hostile raid. Sullivan wrote "the date 1756", but Parson Smith in his Journal showed the correct one, 1758. Williamson, accordingly, felt obliged to accept both, and wrote of two separate events. Sullivan has only the name Preble, as also Smith's Journal, but in the latter the note by Mr. Willis says "Jonathan Preble who was born in York, 1695," thus regarding the father not the son as the real victim. All these writers assign the occurrence to the island of Arrowsic, the location of Jonathan Preble's home, but not of his son the sufferer. His house had been located four miles north, on the east bank of the Kennebec, in a section of Georgetown which by incorporation in the following year became Woolwich. Sullivan knew only of three children captured, yet he had conversed with one or two in after years.

In a historical sketch of Bath and vicinity, by General Joseph Sewall, some errors and apocryphal accretions were attached in the narration of this savage incursion, due to too ready acceptance of floating local traditions unverified by facts then obtainable from one of the captive daughters a few miles away.

He copies Sullivan in the date, the place, the number of captives, and makes Jonathan Preble, the owner of the blockhouse, the victim. He regarded the assailants as a "strong party," which advanced directly upon the Preble garrison, and then upon Harnden's", and also dared a future attack upon a strong fort at the lower end of Arrowsic, where they killed many cattle. He tells of the capture of a Miss Motherwell near Harnden's house. In fact, four Indians, like sly wolves upon a sheep-fold, sprang upon a solitary farm-house, broke in, killed, seized their prey, then fled. The Miss Motherwell capture had only one fact for basis: one captive daughter did become Mrs. Motherwell many years after.

How slight and defective the knowledge of the transaction held by some of the descendants will be perceived by a short notice found in the volume, "The Preble Family."

Documents in the Massachusetts Archives correct and enlarge the family traditions respecting the transaction and the captives.¹ They show the precise number of assailants, the number killed and wounded, a list of the captives, the manner of their detention or "disappearance, or their return home. One paper by the grandfather, Mr. Preble, gives a list of this family, with other names of like sufferers along the Kennebec that year. It assures the accurate date, June 9, 1758. Parson Smith's entry upon the eleventh says "lately," intelligence reaching Falmouth the second day after.

We learn that the second daughter, Mehetabel, entered a family, doubtless of the better class, which soon went to France, and though there was expectation of return, nothing further was ever heard of her. Her two sisters, in the following year when Quebec fell, were discovered by two men, evidently soldiers from the Kennebec in the New England forces. These men in kindness arranged for their ransom which amounted to one hundred dollars, and the girls came home in a transport which arrived at Boston date not known. To little Mary at departure had been given by the foster family a small tablecloth.

In the greetings at Boston by waving flags, hats, handkerchiefs, she had only her tablecloth to use,

which in the swinging slipped from her feeble grasp and it was lost in the harbor.

Some facts indicate that in many, perhaps a majority of cases, English captives were kindly and humanely treated by the French in Canada. Officers of government, wealthy families, seem to have taken as many as they could, of course to be in the place of servants.² Some captives found better homes than they had left. One of these Preble boys, in after life of poorly remunerative toil lamented that his prospects for life had been changed for the worse by returning home. Others, many, must have had lives rugged and harsh because of the conditions of the families into which they fell by the chances of sale. Some captives were retained by the Indians, subjected and agreeably accustomed to their mode of life. Still others, a multitude from the border towns of New England, as they were hurried away by the captors toward the northern wilderness, passed into oblivion, for no word came back to reveal their fate. Not only as concerned miserable captives, but the processes of war were changed for the better in the course of years. Parkman holds that their wars in the eighteenth Century were less cruel and bloodthirsty than in the previous and believes that the teachings and influence of the Jesuits contributed to this result.

In the spring of 1761 the recovery of the remaining Kennebec captives was undertaken. Captain Samuel Harnden, in a petition to the General Court of Massachusetts, detailed the incidents connected with the loss of his grandchildren and sought aid, in his purpose to go to Canada for them and for several others taken in his vicinity. By vote of June 20, a sum of money and letter and credentials were granted to him. He had first proposed to take the Kennebec route, but found reasons to make his journey by way of Crown Point. On the sixteenth of August he reached Montreal and was so speedily successful as to obtain his grandson Samuel on the third day. The boy had fallen into the hands of Major Desney. Five days later he took from a nunnery Elinor, daughter of Lazarus Noble of Swan Island, who had been in captivity eleven years.³ The girl Sarah Fling he learned was at San Antonio, sixty miles distant. Obtaining the needful passport, he set out and crossed the river, but soon some slight indisposition and probably a loss of ardor in her behalf turned him back. It is hoped that the girl who would have been in a measure homeless had she returned, did fare even better in the land of captivity. Intelligence privately obtained led him to seek the younger grandson at or near Quebec, where he arrived by ship on the twenty-ninth of August. On September 1, the lost boy was delivered to his hands. But here the misfortune of a broken arm befell the older boy, causing, expense and delay. The voyage from Quebec to Boston extended from September 17 to October 4. By further delay in sailing eastward he was unable to give the three homebound children a sight of their native Kennebec till October 20.

The narration can only draw the outlines without finer detail of what befell a household of ten persons. Four met death by the bullet and tomahawk; one in France and one in Canada passed out of all knowledge of family or friends; two daughters, after a year, two sons after three and a half years came back to the place of their birth. The older son Samuel came into possession of the farm from which he had been cruelly torn away, still in memory spotted and sacred by blood of parents. He died in 1806. His brother Ebenezer made his home on an adjacent farm, living till 1790. Rebecca, after twenty years from her captivity, married Thomas Motherwell-1778 - residing within two miles of her brothers till her death in 1829. With her dwelt her sister Mary remaining unmarried, and in later years in the family of Captain Lincoln Webb at West Woolwich, attaining the age of eighty-nine in 1843.

Rebecca, as also her sister, became a member of the Congregational church and was esteemed a person of ardent piety traced to experiences of childhood. In that despairing hour when she was driven from home and the lifeless mother's side, she took the only good book possible, a small copy of the Psalter, and retained it and its cheer through the weary, homesick year in Canada.

Treasured, in the family is a plain finger-ring, mournful relic, a precious heirloom. It was on their

mother's hand as she fell dead, and by the bread dough in which her hands were at the moment of alarm, was so concealed as to escape the eye of the plundering savage eager for the rich and bountiful scalp. It has last been in the possession of a daughter of the late Captain George A. Preble of Bath, a great-great-granddaughter of her who wore it at death. If as assumed a marriage ring, it dates back one hundred and fifty-seven years, and has been worn by four persons bearing the name Mary Preble, while a fifth Mary will have rights in succession. So the past transmits, with but the memory of calamities and sorrows, rich gifts of enjoyment and privilege the inheritance of to-day. This event as detailed may have worth as one instance of many hundreds of similar tragedies enacted throughout New England during eighty years of recurring Indian wars. Far more horrible were many; far more agonizing the terror of the foe's onset and the pain of separation; more dreadful and wearying unto death often the toilsome wilderness journey; more heartbreaking the oblivion which covered the fate of hundreds. Certainly much of woe and loss had been avoided if truth and justice had ruled in all relations with the Indians, and also a half century of conflict had been spared with its desolations and cost in human life, if thirst for dominion and the spirit of war had not so controlled the great nations in their stubborn rivalries nor permitted the grasp upon possessions in America to seem to justify the use of those malign savage allies to achieve the ends desired. This event narrated has special significance because of its place at the close of the "Seven Years War," which terminated the period of the "Indian Wars." French instigation ceased and raids on the frontier settlements save a few outbreaks during the War of the Revolution growing out of restless savage natures and greed for spoils. As that band of marauders were trailing through the northern forests and skulking about the Kennebec settlements, the forces of Amherst and Wolfe were massing upon Louisburg, the strong but doomed fortification in which France trusted to defend her eastern territory. The captives were not more than well placed in new homes by the St. Lawrence when the great fortress fell into English hands. The tragedy therefore was contemporary with the first act of the stirring drama of final conquest by Great Britain in North America.

Likewise it was the last known tragedy of the Indian Wars which involved and blotted out a whole family. Indeed it would have for any year distinction in that respect. Subsequently in that summer, records show many persons taken by the enemy. A large portion were captured in the region of Lake George and the northern army and were soldiers evidently. Others were seamen and fishermen on the eastern coast, who were viciously picked off though the Indians were greatly disheartened by the fall of Louisburg. Some dozen names appear of victims of savage incursions in eastern Maine during June, July and August. The price of the ransom was an impelling motive constantly, when French instigation no more set the human wolves upon the prey. But I find only individual captures or two or three at one time. No list of the lost indicates a family, and only two names of females are found among scores of captives. I conclude no whole family was assailed and taken away. No other later capture was reported from the valley of the Kennebec in applications to the State government. No history shows a single name. The war in Maine was virtually ended.

Noticeable likewise is it that this last family tragedy of the last Indian war occurred but one mile distant from the place of the first tragedy of the first Indian war in the valley of the Kennebec, when Richard Hammond's house was vengefully assailed in August, 1676. Not far away, perhaps not a hundred yards from the spot where the bodies of Hammond and companions were cast out stripped and unburied to the winds or the wolves, the murdered parents received loving and as decent burial as the distressing conditions allowed. For that region and all of Maine as well, how many and barbarous, how treacherous and desolating, the deeds of the vengeful enemy which joined those extremes, 1676 and 1758.

After Louisburg a year led on to Quebec's investment and its fall when "England blazed with bonfires, . . . and New England filled the land with jubilation."

Then two captive maidens from the Kennebec stood on the heights or walls of the strong city and saw the movements of ships and soldiers which promised to them deliverance, and long remembered their share in the joy of England's triumph. There was needed only the further campaign against Montreal and then France lowered its flag and by that capitulation "Canada and all its dependencies passed to the British crown," and as Parkman wrote, "Half the continent had changed hands at the scratch of a pen."

NOTE A.

Obviously required as also conformed to present endeavor in New England to mark historic sites, is some simple monument at the burial-place of the victims of this tragedy. It is regarded very desirable by their descendants, and has been mentioned with approval in historical circles. Sufficient funds however are not at present readily obtainable, but steps have been taken to insure that ownership and legal title to the spot shall be vested in some appropriate corporate body, probably the Maine Historical Society.

NOTE B.

It is suitable in aid of family history present and future to append a brief outline of descendants of these parents who fell under savage assault.

Names are given of four generations. Those in the fifth generation, now children and young persons, are enumerated but not named. All were or are residents of Woolwich unless otherwise designated.

These records show in the several families twelve or thirteen master mariners of whom two are now living, one retired from the merchant service and one in command of a government transport. Four or five were seamen of whom two were lost at sea and two died in foreign ports.

But Captain Motherwell was in the militia and had service at the Kennebec in the War of 1812.

DESCENDANTS OF EBENEZER AND MARY (HARNDEN) PREBLE

A. **Rebecca**, eldest daughter and captive; m. Captain Thomas Motherwell.

Rachel, m. Joseph Day.

Rachel *M.*, daughter of Joseph Day, m. Captain Lincoln Webb.

Joseph L. Webb; two sons, one daughter, seven grandchildren.

Mary J. Webb; m. Dr. S. P. Buck, as below.

Joseph Appleton Day, d. 1877; six children, viz.:

Captain Edwin O. Day, Flushing, L. I.; three daughters, one grandson.

Alfred M. Day, West Dresden; two daughters, five grandchildren.

Mrs. Margaret M. Day Carter; one son, three children of deceased daughter.

Mrs. Rachel J. Day Burchard, Hyattsville, Md.; one son.

Daughter and son unmarried, Elizabeth *A.*, Appleton *C.*

Thomas Motherwell; some descendants living, residence not known.

B. **Samuel**, eldest son and captive.

Samuel.

Captain George A. Preble, Bath.

Mrs. Mary Preble Melcher; one son.

Harriet, unmarried.

Charlotte, m. Cleaveland Buck, M. D. ..

Samuel Preble Buck, M. D., d. 1903. By marriage with Mary Jane Webb, their children came into the united lines of Rebecca and Samuel.

Captain Edward P. Buck, d. 1897; one daughter.

Samuel Preble Buck; one son.

One daughter, Rachel, deceased; son and daughter, Cleveland L. and Charlotte L., unmarried.

Sarah, m Captain David G. Stinson.

Captain Edward Preble Stinson, d. 1904.

John Edward, whose two brothers and one sister have died.

Mrs. Roachel P. Stinson Otis, d. 1899.

Captain D. G. Stinson had also a son, Frederic J., lost at sea, and a daughter, Antoinette A., deceased.

Mary, d; 1890; m. Captain William P. Stinson. .

Harriet H., m. Captain John A. Stinson.

Captain William Pearson Stinson.

George Preble Stinson.

Emma Tilden Stinson.

Mary Joanna Stinson.

Captain Francis M. Stinson, d. 1877; m. Mehetabel Stinson.

Charlotte B.

C. **Ebenezer**, m. Martha Smith. A few descendants living, not traced, in his line have been two Free Baptist ministers.

¹Massachusetts Archives, Vols. 38 A and 79.

²For prices of captives refer to Collections Maine Historical Society, Series II, Vol. 10, pp. 194, 196.

³For prices of captives refer to Collections Maine Historical Society, Series II, Vol. 10, pp. 100-202.