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Compiled and Narrated
by
Mattie Kilborn Webster
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The Two Hundredth Anniversary
of the
Town of Merrimack NH

EPISODE 9 - Presented by Merrimack Community Club

MATHEW THORNTON - REVOLUTIONARY WAR
(note: Mathew spelled his name with one "T")

Driven by Religious intolerance, August 4, 1718, five small ships sailed from Ireland. 20 families were on one of those ships. Among them James Thornton, a weaver, and his family. They spent the winter on board ship suffering many hardships. In the Spring they settled in Wiscasset, Maine. Later moving to Worcester, Massachusetts where in 1730 James bought land and established a home.

Mathew lived here from his 16th to his 26th year. During these years he studied medicine with a Dr. Greene in Leicester, Massachusetts. Religious intolerance again drove them from Worcester and on the deed of their property sold at that time, Keiteren, his mother being unable to write made her mark. James moved his family again and for the last time to Pelham (30 miles distant), 1100 acres being allotted to him and his sons. This may have been the beginning of Mathew's interest in real estate, for certainly all his life he was a land boom man. He owned hundreds of acres in many towns. Dublin where his brother settled, Temple, Jaffrey, Fitzwilliam, Stoddard and many other places as well and Merrimack and probably Londonderry. He (and others) were granted Thorton N.H. in 1763.

He left his father's home in Pelham to go to Londonderry to practice medicine. He chose this place without doubt to be among people of his own kind, the Scotch Irish who were known to be thrifty, intelligent and what interested him above all else, honest and paid their bills.

When 48 years old he married Hannah Jack, 18, a great beauty. During the next seven years five children were born to them.

Dr. Thornton's whole life was so finely woven into the fabric of the Revolutionary War; it is impossible to write of one and not the other.

March 4, 1776. Mathew Thornton served as a physician under the Royal Government and was appointed to an honorable position by them. But he was also the first on March 14, 1776 to sign his name on an "Association List Protest" to be sent to Eng. These "List Protests" were sent to each of the 13 colonies and all males were given a chance to sign. It was a protest against abuses of the Mother Country, England. Those who signed pledged themselves, their fortunes, their goods, money and lives in need be to protect the rights of the colonies. Mathew Thornton's name headed the list from his Town (either Londonderry, Exeter or Merrimack) where 15 did not sign. The names of those who did not sign were sent too, and all their firearms, weapons and ammunition were taken from them, and they were not allowed to leave their hometown.

When hostilities really began at Lexington and Concord in which 11 from Merrimack served, he instinctively and promptly lined up with the people and on every occasion he took a decided stand for the cause.

Let us look at his record as a man and a Patriot.

1774. The Com. Of Safety became at once the Executive power. He was the State Chairman. He organized Regiments of Militia.

(Note: The Com. Of Safety in this Town did not wait until July 4, 1776 to organize. They were organized months before and men drilled - trained. When the War began probably (Jan 4, 1776) were again.

They were trained in all Towns at the Town's expense. After the Militia field exercises of drilling was over, before an audience of all who wished to see it. The Militia and people would go to the Meeting House where they would hear a patriotic sermon which was intended to prepare them to fight bravely for "God and their Country" or these "Sons of Liberty" as they were sometimes called might have an entertainment after which the girls would serve refreshments. Our Old Muster Field was at South Merrimack just beyond No. 5 schoolhouse on the flat on the left going toward South Merrimack Village.

Note:

The road from this part of town leading to it was called Thornton's Road. The road from South Merrimack leading to it was called Muster Road.

1781 - An oil painting of Mathew Thornton hangs in the State House (Concord). In appearance he is described as being 6 ft. 1 inch tall; of dark complexion, finely and firmly built, black penetrating eyes. In characteristics a great reader becoming more so as he became older. He had a strong tenacious memory, ready wit, and a fund of jokes and stories. However, he could be satirical, sarcastic and pointed at times. In fact, he was a many-sided man who had many callings. He was a farmer, grantor, moderator, physician, selectman, Speaker of the House, Col. In the Royal Militia (resigned when he reached the age limit), Pres. Of Prov. Congress; Justice of the Peace; Several times sent to the Legislature; Maker and a reviser of laws; Judge of Hillsborough County Court formed in 1771; a framer of the New Hampshire State Constitution, the first document of its kind to be adopted in the United States; a member of the State Council, a State Senator many times; Member of Continental Congress and signer of the Declaration of Independence for which we honor and remember him today. True he was one of the last to sign, but he was trying an important law case in either Amherst or Exeter and did not feel he could leave at the moment. However he started for Philadelphia October 5, arriving November 3, presented his credentials and signed the 4th.

Smallpox was raging throughout the country, particularly in New Hampshire and in the same year, November 8, in either Philadelphia or Baltimore he was vaccinated. It cost him \$18 and nearly his life as he was very sick (he was 72 years old at the time) and he could not return home until January. His eyesight was so impaired by the recent illness; he was obliged to refuse a second term as Delegate to Continental Congress. Either before or shortly after he had whopping cough partially paralyzing his vocal cords unfitting him for public speaking, but people were still willing to listen because of what he had to say.

1780 - About this time he moved to this Town, purchasing the late Dr. Greeley estate at Thornton's Ferry. This farm had lately been confiscated from a wealthy, and very well educated man by the name of Lutwyche who was a Colonel in the British army. Lutwyche fled, going to Boston, to join Gen. Gage's army and fought with them in the Revolution. Mrs. Lutwyche found that running the

Ferry was too much of a hardship and petitioned the Legislature for a release. Thornton petitioned for rights to run it, and against much opposition from Litchfield who filed two protests against him, Thornton was granted right in 1784 controlling 4 miles up and down the river on both sides. The name was changed from Lutwyche Ferry to Thornton's Ferry. Mrs. Lutwyche is buried at Thornton's Ferry. She left a small legacy to the Town.

1789 - Mathew Thornton's wife aged 42 and one of his sons died within only a few months of each other and from then on for the remaining years he lived more and more a retired life spending his time writing historical essays for current publications. He made an attempt at an philosophical work never finished. He died age 99 and is buried at the family lot in Thornton's Ferry Cemetery beside his wife and children and among several other relatives near the center of the Cemetery where Ruth Burnap is buried.

The following Sunday after his death the Rev. Jacob Burnap preached a memorial sermon on his life and work. As a memorial the State erected a monument to Hon. Matthew Thornton - and we Americans have enrolled him on the list of "Immortal Patriots." (On the memorial his name is spelled with two "T"s.