

## Indian Carry, the Dead River, and Leeds' First Settler

Before White people came to the area, Native Americans had hundreds of small settlements all around in the "Thirty Mile River" - a number of lakes and rivers that made up the Androscoggin River watershed, from the highlands up north near Farmington (that separate the Androscoggin from the Sandy River), to the Dead River at Indian Carry and Lake Androscoggin. This was very fertile land as we know today and the Indians loved it.

Indian Carry is a reverse delta, a geological formation caused by the fact that the Androscoggin River and Lake Androscoggin are usually at the same height, thus the name Dead River, because there is little flow. When the lake is high, water flows to the river, and when the river is in flood, water flows to the lake. Sediment has been deposited and built up at the mouth, and the river channel flows north from Indian Carry for more than a mile before it enters the lake. Indian Carry is only about a 100 feet wide when the water is low, and the Indians, wanting to get to the south of the lake, could carry their canoes over it and save a couple miles of rowing out of their way north. And, it was at Indian Carry that Indians often encamped.

Relations between Whites and Indians started out friendly in the Massachusetts Colony, but in 1676, 350 friendly coastal Indians in Maine were captured and sold into slavery. Still, it was only after a decade of being captured and sold that the Abenakis chiefs finally declared war on Whites, in 1689. Over the next 4 decades, Whites massacred whole Indian villages or drove them north. Finally a treaty was signed in 1726, but there were only 5 warriors over the age of 16 by then in this area. By the time Thomas Stinchfield came to Indian Carry, in 1777 or 8, there were about 500 Indians, but many Whites still thought "the only good Indian was a dead one". Leeds first settler however was not one of them.

Thomas Stinchfield was born in Gloucester, Mass. in 1749 to parents who met and married there. His father, John, was born in Leeds, England (for which the Town of Leeds is named) and his mother, Elizabeth, in Ireland of Scottish parents. In 1755, the Massachusetts court granted the parents a plot of land in New Gloucester, in the District of Maine. In New Gloucester, the young Thomas' job was to watch the woods for approaching Indians, while the adults worked with their rifles close at hand.

Thomas Stinchfield was known for arguing for the kind treatment of Indians. As he grew older, Thomas spent much time in the woods, and eventually, met Chief Sabattis and his tribe (probably Anasagunticooks, part of the decimated Abenakis nation) who were encamped at Indian Carry on the north bank of the Dead River. Thomas so impressed the Indians with his kindness and fairness that they soon gave him the revered name of "Father Thomas", and they came to him, Solomon-like, with their disputes and quarrels, and his decisions were accepted as law. Chief Sabattis respected Thomas so much that he moved his whole village a short distance north, off the cleared land, and gave it to Thomas to settle on. In those days, this area was known by Whites as Littleborough Plantation, in the County of Kennebeck, Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

In 1779, Thomas and his younger brother, Rogers, came up the Androscoggin and Dead Rivers with tools to plant a garden and build a log house for Thomas next to the Indians. For Rogers, they built another house on the south side of the river at the bend opposite the campground. The bros. returned to New Gloucester, then came back to store the crops, hunt venison and dried it, and returned again to their families. They made another trip in winter pulling sleds with things for their houses. Then, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June, 1780, they set out with their families and a few helping friends, for Turner where the friends left them. They arrived here with families at sunset on the following day. With this kindness of the Indians, who were their only neighbors, Thomas set up a trading post, and thus began the Town of Leeds, although it was not incorporated until February 13, 1801, when it became the 128<sup>th</sup> town in the District of Maine. (Maine became the 23rd State on March 15, 1820.)

