**Morris**

A noteworthy excerpt from “*La paroisse de Quinan va célébrer son centenaire*” can be found in the second and third columns of page 4 of the Thursday, October 22, 1959 (Volume 23, No. 27) issue of *Le Petit Courrier du Sud-Ouest de la Nouvelle-Écosse* reads as follows;

The Micmac Indians still inhabited this region when the first Acadians arrived and a certain number of them remained there long enough; the last were Tony, Joseph and William Pictou. The first Acadian to come and settle at the ‘Forks’—today Quinan—was Jean Baptiste Muise who had married Geneviève Moulaison, daughter of Joseph Moulaison 1st. He was followed closely by two brothers, both sons of Michel Doucet and Marie Muise. The first, Jacques Doucet, first married Anne LeBlanc, daughter of Charles LeBlanc, and married secondly, Théotiste Muise. He was the father of 29 children, The second, Joseph Doucet, married Angélique Muise, daughter of Paul Muise. These pioneers were followed by Marc Frontain, Sylvestre Jacquard, Alexis Vacant (Vachon) and Marcel Collin. More recently arrived were the ***Morrises,*** the Hatfields, the Blanchards, the Melansons and the Dulains. In 1858, there were about thirty families at the ‘Forks’ and the faithful had to walk to Sainte-Anne du Ruisseau to receive the sacraments and to assist with the mass, a distance of 10 miles for some and up to 16 miles for the most distant. It was then that the Rév. Père Henry L. Berthe, Curate of Sainte-Anne du Ruisseau, conceived the idea of building a chapel in this locality and appealed to the generosity of the parishioners of Pubnico, of Ste-Anne du Ruisseau.

The name of the ***Morris*** woman Jean Baptiste-Thomas and Marie Mius’ son, Louis Thomas married is provided in an excerpt from Ruth Holmes Whitehead’s 1991 collection of excerpts from historical documentation concerning the Mi’kmaq Peoples entitled, *The Old Man Told Us: Excerpts from Micmac History: 1500-1950.* This excerpt can be found on pages 299 and 300 and is taken from unpublished notes of historian Harry Piers, one-time curator of the Nova Scotia Museumin Halifax, Nova Scotia. These unpublished notes are dated March 13, 1915 and read as follows:

The death occurred at Indian Reserve, Shubenacadie, on Thursday last (11th March 1915) of Mary Noel, widow of the late Chief John Noel of the Micmac Indians, at the venerable age of about 93 years. She was universally respected by both white men and Indians, to the latter of whom she was always known as Marl-nan-ette [her baptismal name, Marie Antoinette], and was lovingly spoken of among the tribe as “our old great mother.” She had been a Thomas, and her grandfather [***Paul Morris***] set mink traps on the site where Halifax now stands. She had been twice married, her first husband being a Sack, by whom she had a son Isaac, who is now a captain in the tribe. She will be buried today at Indian Reserve.

Harry Piers MS, 13 March 1915. Unpublished notes, Nova Scotia Museum Printed Matter file.

Marie Antoinette, born 16 October 1822 was the daughter of ***Mary Morris Thomas*** and her second husband, Louis Thomas, her maternal grandfather was ***Paul Morris***, and her paternal grandfather, the English deserter Thomas, mentioned in entries for 1749 and 1758. Her brother Michael Thomas married Mary Jerome, and her sister Madelaine Thomas married John Williams. She herself married Peter Sack (Jacques), and had Francis, b. 1840, Louis, b. 1845, Catherine, b. 1849, Martin, and Isaac, b. 1855. After the death of her first husband, she married in March 1870 Chief John Noel, himself a widower, and the adopted son of Chief James Paul. She had no children by John Noel, who predeceased her on 20 May 1911. A skirt made for Marie Antoinette Thomas Sack Noel by her mother, ***Mary Morris Thomas***, is in the collections of the Nova Scotia Museum.

Based on this information, we can conclude that Louis Thomas, son of Chief Jean-Baptiste Thomas and Marie Mius married a First Nations woman named ***Mary Morris***.

It is still possible that he may have been this “English deserter”and had converted to Catholicism, which would explain why he carried a French name of Jean-Baptiste. It is also plausible, however, that Chief Jean-Baptiste Thomas was not the “English deserter”himself, but was rather the son, or grandson of this original Thomas.

It is unlikely that we can confirm the true origins of the Thomas Mi’kmaq family, aside from this family having mixed-ancestry roots stemming from the intermarriage of a (likely English) British Navy deserter of pre-Deportation Acadia and his unknown First Nations wife.

Another oral tradition was shared with Holmes Whitehead by Max Basque concerning the origins of the Thomas Mi’kmaq family. This information was offered in a personal conversation in 1977 and in a taped interview in 1984 and can be found on page 146 of Holmes Whitehead’s 1991 collection of excerpts from historical documentation concerning the Mi’kmaq Peoples and reads;

An English deserter surnamed Thomas married a Micmac woman and had several children. His son married a ***Morris woman***…Louis Thomas was his name. He had another son named Absalom [Anselm]. Absalom Thomas. And there was a Clara Thomas; one of the original daughters of this deserter was named Clara [Claire]. She was held as hostage, as a prisoner in Halifax for a long time. I don’t know where in the world I heard that story…She was held hostage for quite a while, I don’t know why, I suppose when they had the bounty on Indians…I suppose they collected it in Fort Edward, near Windsor? Some of the Chiefs were ambushed down Ponhook Lake. Grandfather Sack used to tell us all them stories.

Based on this second retelling of the oral tradition surrounding the origins of the Thomas Mi’kmaq family, we are led to believe that it is actually Jean-Baptiste Thomas himself who was the English deserter. This is possible, however, it could also have been Thomas Albassou (Thomas Albiston) who was the deserter.

Either way, this excerpt contradicts the idea concerning this family in relation to the time period that the “original Thomas” had “deserted the Navy, and went to live among the Indians”and had “an Indian girl” (a First Nations woman), as Chief Jean-Baptiste Thomas appears in the historical record of Acadia long before the arrival of Governor Edward Cornwallis in the colony.

Also worth noting in relation to this excerpt is that it clarifies that Max Basque’s reference to “Absalom” as Anselm Thomas in the previous re-telling of the origins of the Thomas family by Max to Holmes Whitehead in March of 1984.

If either Jean-Baptiste Thomas or Thomas Albassou were in fact of English origin, this is a perfect example of a European man being ascribed an Indigenous identityand becoming a Chief of the nation he married into, as was the case of Baron Jean-Vincent d’Abbadie de Saint-Castin and the Abenaki Nation.

A conversion to Catholicism would also explain why Jean-Baptiste Thomas, if he was in fact the English deserter, had a French first and middle name and was permitted to marry Marie Mius, as having the name Marie is strong indication that Marie herself was baptized as a Catholic.

Additional insight into the historic division between the Acadians and the English during the period of post-Deportation Cape Sable/Argyle, Nova Scotia can be found on pages 08 and 09 of the 1979 reprint of local historian Jackson Ricker’s 1941 book, *Historical Sketches of Glenwood and the Argyles: Yarmouth County Nova Scotia*;

A few years after the expulsion of many of the Acadians and the driving into hiding of others, settlers from the coast towns and ports of New England came to the province and in many places occupied the lands formerly belonging to the Acadians. Among those coming at that time were the New England settlers of Abuptic. It was in the year 1766 that several families of exiled Acadians came to Pubnico, their former home. About that time, the Acadians who had lived at Abuptic and other points along these shores returned from exile and from their refuges and settled on the lands near, forming the French settlements that have in lapse of years grown into large and prosperous villages. The Acadians would naturally wish to live in communities of their own race and religion and thus we find them to be the pioneers of Eel Brook (now Ste. Anne du Ruisseau), the Pubnicos, Quinan, Tusket Wedge, and some of the island settlements such as ***Morris Island*** and Surette’s Island. These places are almost entirely French people, the boundary between them and the English-speaking neighbors being quite distinct.