



A "Revolutionary" Irishman!

James Magee was born in County Down, Ireland in 1750. He emigrated to the colonies not long before the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, settling in Boston. He became captain of a privateer (privateers were privately-owned vessels that were authorized by the colonial government to capture British vessels to divert supplies to the Continental forces). He gained his first "prize" when, as commander of the privateer ***Independence***, he captured the British ship ***Countess*** and brought her into Boston harbor. In 1778, Magee was sailing the privateering brig ***General Arnold***, with a crew of 105 men and boys, out of Boston. (The ***General Arnold*** was named for Benedict Arnold, hero of the failed American attempt in 1775 to capture Quebec; Arnold later turned traitor to the cause, his treachery was not discovered until May of 1779.)

Seeking shelter from a freezing snowstorm, Magee decided to shelter in Plymouth Harbor. Gale force winds drove the ***General Arnold*** onto the flats in Plymouth Harbor. The weather was so severe that rescuers from Plymouth could not reach the vessel for three days. During that time, 70 men froze to death. Most were buried in a mass grave on Plymouth's Burial Hill. Magee was among those who survived.

James Magee continued to risk his life by sailing for several more years in the Patriot cause.

In 1783, James Magee married Margaret Elliott of Boston. They had nine children, three sons and six daughters.

After the war, Magee enjoyed a successful career in the China trade. He brought back cargoes of tea, ginseng, silks, lacquerware and chinaware. A punch bowl and cider jug brought back from China by Captain Magee are now in the collections of the Peabody-Essex Museum in Salem. After one particularly successful 3-year voyage, between 1791 and 1794, Magee was able to retire from the sea. He and his wife moved from Boston to nearby Roxbury, where he purchased the mansion of former Governor William Shirley. (The home, now known as the Shirley-Eustis House, is a museum and open to the public. Our thanks to the Shirley-Eustis House for providing information about the Captain.)

Magee never forgot the *General Arnold*. His particular regret was that he had decided to shelter in Plymouth Harbor - another vessel caught in the same storm had remained at sea off Cape Cod and survived intact. Throughout his life, this "convivial, noble-hearted Irishman" assisted the survivors of the ***General Arnold*** whenever they were in need. During those years when Magee was not at sea, he also hosted Christmas parties for the families of the men of the ***General Arnold***. Magee's final wish was to be buried with his lost crew. When he died in 1801, aged 51, he was brought back to Plymouth's Burial Hill and his name added to the obelisk that marks the ***General Arnold*** graves.