

Malaga Island The Community That Maine Erased

Noah Binette  
Senior Division  
Individual Exhibit

### **How I Chose My Topic:**

I chose my topic from past experience after doing state-based topics for the last three years. When this year's theme was presented, I decided to research Malaga Island off the coast of Phippsburg. In 1911, the Governor of Maine, Frederic Plaisted, evicted 40 legal residents of Malaga Island; eight were forcibly placed in the "School for the Feebleminded". The state burnt their shacks to the ground and exhumed the graves, which violated the natural rights of the residents and broke the state's responsibility to protect and serve its citizens. Malaga Island is a very important part of Maine's history that has never been fully resolved. In 2012, John Baldacci apologized to the descendants of Malaga Island and the Maine Historical Society displayed an exhibit about the evicted citizens' lives on Malaga Island. This apology and recognition made the island a part of the Maine Coast Heritage Trust and the Maine Freedom Trail. The exhumed 17 bodies that are still buried at Pineland Farms in five caskets. I sent a letter to Governor LePage and the Speaker of the house Mark Eves as well as other Maine representatives saying that in order for the apology to be complete the bodies should be moved back to the island and laid to rest.

### **How I Conducted My Research:**

I started my research by looking at the residents on the island. This then informed me how eight of the residents were evicted and put into the "School of the Feebleminded". These eight included a complete family of seven and a single woman. In 2010 Governor Baldacci apologized for the actions that the state committed; however, actions speak louder than words and the bodies that were moved to the "School of the Feebleminded" have not been brought back to the island.

### **How I Created and Developed my Exhibit:**

My exhibit was created around the idea of displaying the evolution from the simple lives of the Malaga island inhabitants, then to the eviction and finally the apology from Governor John Baldacci. I wanted to show how severe the state's actions were. These included the immediate forced eviction of all residents on the island, the burning of properties and the exhuming of the graves on the island. The state imprisoned eight residents from a thriving community on false charges and made the rest of the residents leave the island without a real reason.

### **How my Topic Relates to Theme:**

My topic relates to Rights and Responsibilities by the disruption of the rights of the Island of Malaga inhabitants and the gross injustice that was perpetrated in 1911. The citizens on Malaga Island were living well and surviving prior to the eviction. The state was responsible for their actions but didn't take responsibility for the eviction. The reasons the state evicted the residents were due to economics, racism and eugenics. The state thought that the island had great tourism value, they felt the island was a blemish on Maine's coast and that Phippsburg didn't want to give money to the citizens on the island.

