Life in Historic Hancock County

As revealed by National Register of Historic Places listings

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Introduction

Hancock County is blessed with many surviving places of historic significance that remind residents and visitors of its varied and colorful past. The National Register of Historic Places lists some of the most noteworthy of these sites and preserves a written chronicle of the 102 listings. Listed sites are <u>underlined</u>. Quotations in this account are from the *National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Forms*.

Still Searching for the Past

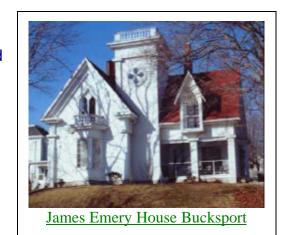
Most of the listed places representing twenty-five communities contain structures built within the last three centuries. Archaeological sites, however may contain clues to life in a more distant past. Many artifacts have been discovered in Hancock County left behind by Native American inhabitants and a few by pre-Colombian European visitors. Because of the sensitivity of the evidence hidden in them, access to known dig sites is generally restricted to archaeologists. These places remind us that life as we know it in Maine has not been this way for long and that the process of taming the wilderness was filled with hard work and sometimes bitter conflict.



Maritime Beginnings:

The two-masted <u>Schooner Bowdoin</u> is reminiscent of handcrafted wooden sailing vessels that brought the first white settlers to North America. The Bowdoin is now part of the training fleet of the Maine Maritime Academy in Castine, and also serves to represent two of the original and most enduring major industries in Hancock County: fishing and boat-building. More than just a staple food source and a mode of local transportation, *fish and ships* have provided Downeast folks with the goods and

conveyance necessary to engage in trade around the world. Sea captains brought back wealth in the form of necessary goods, as well as technological advances, exotic treasures and a taste for foreign fashions sometimes seen in the design of their homes.



Another quintessential element of navigation

found in Castine is the <u>Lighthouse at Dyce's Head</u>. This stone-tower beacon and ten other historic lights, provided an indispensable service to the seamen who plied the waters of Hancock County. The families who lived at, and tended the lighthouses, the



Dyce's Head Lighthouse

original light sources and the bells have mostly been replaced by automation, but the structures endure, still serving their intended purposes.

While not as impressive as Fort Knox, across the Penobscot from Bucksport in Waldo County, <u>Fort George</u> in Castine provided the protection that the coastal colonists, traders and vested interests needed through several wars. It now stands as a reminder of

the worst naval defeat ever suffered by the United States (at the hands of the British), but also the eventual victories that allowed Americans to lastingly rule these shores.

Community

The Castine Historic District on Dyer

Neck in Penobscot Bay and the Off-Neck

Historic District of Castine comprise the oldest and most complete historical community of any of the registered places in Hancock

County. Castine's storied past is inscribed in the way it stands today, an entire village with picturesque outlying farms, splendid homes,



Shops in Castine

businesses, schools, churches, docks, stores, public buildings and structures for its defense. Its written history characterizes the struggles our forebears endured to gain a foothold in the New World:

"Castine was in the early 17th century a small, fortified trading post called Pentagoet. It was selected, as early as 1630, for this purpose by the Plymouth Company. Over the next forty years, it passed back and forth between the French and the English and in 1674 it was even captured by the Dutch and held for two years...

...In 1759, Governor Pownall wrote of an abandoned French settlement called Pentagoet which had once been a pleasant habitation. In 1760, Pentagoet was resettled but this time by men of English descent... On June 17, 1779, four British ships carrying seven hundred troops from Halifax arrived at Castine. Their purpose was to establish an outpost on what was to be the western boundary of New Ireland, which was to be a haven for Loyalists following the war.

...The town remained in British hands until the conclusion of peace. The British came again in 1814 and repaired the fort that they had originally built. They, at one time during the occupation, had four thousand troops in Castine. They also occupied Fort Madison, largest of the Castine batteries which had been built by the United States in 1811. No attempt was made to dislodge the British from Castine where they remained-until 1815, and they hardly disrupted the prosperity of the small community. Fort George was never garrisoned again but Fort Madison was reconstructed and garrisoned during the Civil War by U.S. troops.

Castine was set off from the town of Penobscot and incorporated in the year 1796.



Castine town green

Penobscot had been the county seat, but because the county buildings were in the village of Castine, she became the county seat at her incorporation as a separate town. Castine remained the county seat until 1838 when the courts were moved to Ellsworth.

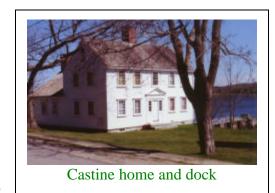
During the period following the war of 1812, Castine was one of the wealthiest towns of its size in New England. It is during this period that many of the fine buildings and residences were constructed. Castine was at this time a

large fishing and shipping port, and during this period she prospered economically and her population grew. During the mid-nineteenth century with the advent of better land transport and better roads Castine began to feel the economic pinch. Because of her geographical position, Castine was left outside the mainstream of commercial expansion. The commercial importance of Castine ended with the death of the sailing ship.

This did not, however, mean the death of Castine. Since the year 1867, there has always been in the town of Castine an Educational Institution. The Eastern State Normal School was founded that year and continued until 1942 when the Maine Maritime Academy took over its facilities. The schools of Castine have been a stabilizing factor, and unlike so many of the small towns in Maine that have died when their economic base had gone, Castine remains as a flourishing community.

The very fact that this late 18th - early 19th century village exists today is precisely because Castine is off the beaten track. Castine has been saved and preserved, and we, the citizens of the twentieth century, are fortunate that such an important and significant part of our history physically exists on the coast of Maine.

The Castine Historic District is justifiable on its history alone. Indeed it is one of the most historic villages on the coast of New England. Castine merits National Register recognition from another perspective as well; for although there are no great mansions in Castine, the sum total of its parts add up to an almost undisturbed 18th and 19th century environment. From the environmental and aesthetic perspective, Castine has few rivals. In addition to its



aesthetic and historical integrity, the peninsula benefits from being almost surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean."

As the application text from 1973 states, Castine endured the early years of turmoil and has continued to prosper, albeit in different ways. The charm, tranquility and closeness of the community attract residents and visitors from around the world.

Livelihood

Making a living in Hancock County has never been easy for most of its inhabitants. Even in their zenith, fishing and trade were demanding and dangerous



E. B. White home in Brooklin

pursuits. Though farming the thin, rocky soil has never been as financially rewarding as cultivating the ground further west, numerous examples of subsistence and market farms remain as a testament to Yankee ingenuity, thrift and hard work. The architecture of some farms even demonstrates a surprisingly high level of prosperity and attention

to style.

The attached "big house, little house, backhouse, barn" motif is evident throughout Hancock County and dominant in places. Brooklin is the home of dozens of connected farm structures in a wide array of shapes and styles. Visitors may wonder about the origin of this pattern, because it never became popular beyond northern New England. Though no one can be sure of individual motives, connected buildings seem to have appealed to pragmatic Maine farmers as a "modern" style that offered the advantages of efficiency and protection from inclement weather. The threat of a devastating fire, the demise of New England farming and perhaps internal



"Connected farm" in Castine



Swan's Island "connected trailer"

plumbing and other innovations seem to have ended the proliferation of these sprawling wooden bastions. The "Back to the Landers" of the 1960's and 70's gave many old farms new life, while others built their own vernacular architecture. This new generation of

architecture. This new generation of subsistence farmers often shared the affinity of their predecessors for "occupational plurality", doing many kinds of work to survive on the land.

Many of the qualities that once made

for an ideal dwelling, such as the connected outhouse and dark, damp cellar with a spring running through, have become "liabilities" now that wastewater disposal, food storage and water are supplied through modern means. The powerhouse and dam in Ellsworth symbolizes the technological progress that dramatically changed the lives of contemporary Americans.

The Ellsworth Powerhouse and Dam, located less than one mile from downtown Ellsworth, is one of the oldest "peaking" facilities in the state, and represents a unique design, for the dam itself is hollow (called an Ambursen type, after the designer). It consists of two thin steel reinforced slabs of concrete support by concrete buttresses built of fifteen foot intervals. The dam is also the highest of its type ever constructed, and the granite ledge upon which it sits insures longevity.



Ellsworth Powerhouse

The engineer of the project was James T. Leonard, distinguished in his field, who worked for the Bar Harbor and Union River Power Company (acquired by Bangor Hydro-Electric in 1925). In 1928 Leonard wrote a report which contains the following vivid and colorful description:

"Owing to the natural beauty of the surroundings, the great height of the dam, and the architectural features of the power house, the Ellsworth station is undoubtedly the handsomest power station in New England. The dam and power house are located between two rugged granite bluffs rising almost perpendicularly to a height of nearly one hundred feet above the bed of the river; between these primeval ledges stretches a massive dam of concrete and steel, rising seventy-one feet above the bed rock, the highest power dam in New England. The power house is located at the foot of the bluff on the westerly side of the river, and is a handsome building constructed of concrete block, with large circular topped windows nearly thirty feet high; above these windows is an ornate cornice formed of concrete, and the building is surmounted by a roof of red Spanish tiles."

Though not hospitable to farming, available transportation, waterpower and raw materials made the Maine coast particularly well suited for traditional manufacturing as well as capitalizing on the advances of the industrial revolution.

The Blue Hill Historic District, Franklin and Sullivan are good examples of communities that capitalized on nearby natural resources:

Lumbering became the first major industry following the erection of the earliest sawmill in 1765 and easy access to the sea resulted in large scale export of the product to

Boston and other ports.

Shipbuilding was also an important part of the economy for almost exactly a century between 1792 and 1891. In 1790 a potash works at the town landing began production. The early 19th century saw the development of varied industry along Mill Brook



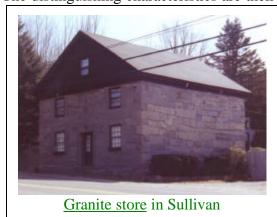
Granite-hauling galamander

including a very early cotton mill, a carding and fulling mill, a tool shop, grist mill furniture mill and a cooperage. Granite quarrying for export began in 1816 and in 1836 eighteen large cargoes were shipped for use in construction at Charlestown Navy Yard in Massachusetts. In 1876 copper was discovered in the area and a mining boom of significant proportions began with many companies formed and large numbers of outside workers brought in

One of two intact examples known to survive in Maine, the Robertson Quarry Galamander is a specialized granite-hauling vehicle once common in the State's numerous quarries. Although its date of construction is uncertain, vehicles like it were in use during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rescued from the quarry in 1965 where it had been abandoned early this century, the Galamander was placed on exhibit under a shelter in the public park where it rests today... The distinguishing characteristics are their

derricks or levers which, when combined with a block and tackle, could lift large pieces of stone and transport them, underslung, between the wheels.

The Granite Store or, as it was once called, the Old Salt Store was built probably in the 1840's or 50's by John Paul Gordon of locally quarried granite. In its early years, its principle function was to supply salt for preserving the catches of Grand Banks cod fishermen. It also supplied heavy winter



clothing to protect these dorymen from the rigors of North Atlantic winters.

Religion

Early records of the town of Sedgwick (incorporated in 1789) make it clear that fostering Christian practice within its borders was a high priority. The people at town meeting raised the funds needed to build a meetinghouse and a parsonage. Tax dollars were even used to pay the local minister of the gospel. This



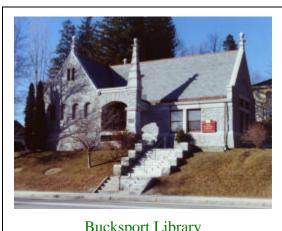
Sedgwick meeting house turned Town House

practice was halted in 1828, apparently because citizens disagreed on the content of what was preached by the Reverend Daniel Merrill. From that point on, ministers were supported by free-will offerings of church members instead of municipal appropriation. It seems that the "wall of separation" between church and state in the minds of the early inhabitants of Sedgwick was a personal and practical matter rather than constitutional in nature.

The meetinghouse was eventually converted to municipal use as a Town House after the larger <u>First Baptist Church</u> was built to accommodate the growing congregation. The seminary, convent and many prominent meeting houses listed on the National Register speak to the importance of religion in Hancock County community life.

Public Buildings and Public Works

Though often scarce on the frontier of settlement, vital services like education, law enforcement, postal delivery, utilities and transportation infrastructure have been provided by various levels of governments. Another important feature of early towns were their schools and libraries. Many small



Bucksport Library

schoolhouses were erected to serve the dispersed populations in rural areas.

First settled in 1808, Aurora in the census of 1820 listed only nine heads of families, yet by that year they had already erected a school. By 1825 it was attended by 35 children at a cost of \$85.00 per annum. On April 2, 1827 a legal meeting of the inhabitants of the plantation voted to build a new schoolhouse of brick, 25 feet square with seats on three sides...

The Duck Cove School represents a common theme in the educational patterns of

Maine towns; patterns which persisted in many instances well into the twentieth From the earliest period of century. schoolhouse construction, utilitarian oneroom frame (in some cases brick or rarer still, stone,) buildings were erected throughout community's a several districts accommodate to the instructional needs of children. In Bucksport this process had led by 1859, to the construction of twenty-two schoolhouses in the town's eighteen school districts (Coolidge and Mansfield,



Duck Cove School in Bucksport

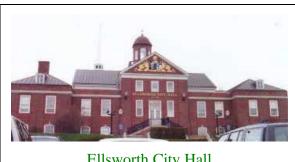
p. 79). This number had diminished somewhat by 1881 and fallen to fifteen by the time the Subject building was erected (School Report). One factor in the decline in this number was undoubtedly the dramatic population drop which Bucksport, like most rural areas of the State, experienced during the second half of the nineteenth century. From a population of 3,381 persons in 1850, the town had lost more than 1,000 persons or about a third of its inhabitants by 1900.

Local and county governments have played Important roles in the shaping of the American landscape. Though some folks rarely visit the military outposts, town and city halls, public libraries and

schools, court houses and registries of deeds that their tax dollars construct; well-ordered facades impart a sense of gratification to the community. The architecture of such buildings usually tries to reflect the importance of their function and the stability that governments provide to society.



Old Hancock County Buildings



Ellsworth City Hall

"After much ado, Ellsworth became the county seat on February 17, 1837. On April 3, following, the town of Ellsworth held a special election to decide the question of giving the lot and townhouse to the county, and the buildings and lot were transferred to the county for (as the deed states) 'five dollars and divers other good and lawful considerations."

The evolution of transportation in Hancock County did much to change the lives of ordinary folks. The Ocean, rivers, streams and lakes provided the first convenient means to move along the coast and inland waterways. When crude roads were carved through the wilderness, the requirements of horse drawn vehicles shaped the landscape as farmers grew grain & hay and settlements ventured further inland.



Southwest Harbor



Dix Family stable in Tremont

The Lucerne Inn is significant for its long history as a resting place for travelers between Bangor and Ellsworth, and also for its connection with the planned community of the 1920's, Lucerne-in-Maine. Construction of the first building was completed c.1815; it has been remodeled many times since, the most recently in the late 1920's, at which time it was also moved about 100 yards to the east.

Freight and passenger railroad service increased mobility and commerce. Heavy industries, like paper making in Bucksport benefit greatly because of inexpensive freight hauling afforded by railroads.



<u>The Jed Prouty Inn</u> in Bucksport accommodated stagecoach travelers.

This building is a survival of the typical small town railway stations which sprang up in the latter third of the nineteenth century as railroad development mushroomed to include more and more relatively small community with subordinate branches. The earliest rail lines in Maine connected only the larger towns on the coastal route from Boston to New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. By the 1870's, however, more and more smaller towns which, like Bucksport, were centers of maritime activity were tied into the main routes.

In 1851 the Northeast American and European Railway Company was chartered

and put forward the grand scheme of shortening the sea voyage from New York to Europe by transporting passengers by rail from that city to the port of Canso in Nova Scotia for their ocean departure This would render the crossing about 1000 miles shorter. While this plan never received popular acceptance, the company did lay many miles of track and was responsible for the line running from Bangor to Bucksport.



The Bucksport Railroad Station



The <u>Stanwood Homestead</u> is now a wildlife sanctuary called "Birdsacre".



Down the road a piece from Birdsacre.

The Maine State Highway system with its route-shortening bridges, opened the floodgates for tourism in Hancock County. High-speed roads not only encouraged visitors and "transplants", but also enabled a migration of urban dwellers to the countryside, blurring the distinction between town and country settings. Equipped with automobiles fueled by affordable gasoline, folks found that they could live in pastoral splendor and commute to work in the cities and towns. A movement to stem the tide of "suburban sprawl" is gaining momentum as people realize that rural paradise is lost and service center communities suffer when this pattern of development dominates.

The Waldo-Hancock Bridge provided a vital link in coastal vehicular transportation connecting eastern and western Maine at the head of Penobscot Bay. Previously, the only other such link had been in Bangor twenty miles further up the Penobscot River. Beyond its



Waldo-Hancock Bridge and Fort Knox.

practical importance, the bridge is recognized for the beauty of its design and its scenic location.

Society, Entertainment and "Vacationland"

The relatively cool summers and gorgeous scenery have drawn visitors to Hancock County's coastal towns and lakes for centuries. Building, serving and entertaining wealthy and not-so-wealthy visitors is a major industry. Some amusements even stay open throughout the



The Claremont Hotel in Southwest Harbor

winter to cater to the year-round residents. Large wood-framed hotels became popular destinations for travelers by steamship or rail:

The Claremont Hotel stands as one of the last reminders of Maine's summer resort period of the 1870's and 80's. In an era still unaffected by the rush and bustle of modern transportation and tourism, areas such as Mount Desert became summer meccas for those with sufficient means to leave the sweltering cities. Arriving by train with numerous trunks and other baggage, families would spend the entire summer ensconced in the luxurious hotels like the Claremont. Each such hotel became for a season a kind of community unto itself, a "home away from home" with quiet pastimes like picnicking, fishing, hiking and occasional excursions taking up the passing days.

Like many of its traditional residents, buildings in Downeast Maine are called upon to perform multiple occupations. The Stonington opera house is a good example of an edifice that has seen several incarnations and various functions:

In 1912, the present [Stonington] Opera House was built by Dr. B. Lake Noyes and others. Although considerably reduced in size from its prior structure [destroyed by fire], this new facility accommodated an equal range of functions including that of a town hall (until 1951), roller skating rink, high school basketball court (until 1946-47) and a screening hall for silent movies... "talkies" and... live shows.

Summer cottages, such as those found in the <u>West Street Historic District</u> in Bar Harbor, have survived in their original roles as summer places for the rich. Others have been converted to new uses. Examples include inns, art galleries, offices, libraries, museums and the home of Jackson Laboratory's training program. Some "Gentleman farms" have found similar fates in the hands of new owners.

<u>"Somesville</u> is also notable as an early artist's mecca and perhaps the first place visited by the "rusticators", the progenitors of the legions of summer folk who have made Mount Desert a legendary summer resort."

The influx of summer people creates demand for retail and eating establishments. Even the shops of Bar Harbor convey a sense of history:



Sproul's Café: "Mr. And Mrs. Robert Sproul first opened a restaurant in 1870, but the quarters soon became too small for the popular, 'Pioneer Restaurant', so an entirely new facility was constructed in 1880. Elihu J. Hamor erected the present building on a much larger and more elaborate scale than the other. The Sprouls served elegant dinners, catered local affairs, and became nationally

famous for the way they 'served wine in defiance of the Maine Law""

Perhaps the best of all forms of leisure activity is provided by countryside itself. The

carriage paths built by the Roosevelt family in present-day Acadia National Park illustrate how the playground of the wealthy has been transformed into a place of rest and relaxation for the masses.



Acadia Park Carriage path bridge

For more information, see also...

http://www.kalama.com/~mariner/hiscas.htm

http://www.acadia.net/anp/

http://www.maineattraction.info/region/region_downeast.php

http://www.barharborinfo.com/