

AREA HISTORY

Maine and its surrounding islands were formed as a result of the Ice Age, so the state's earliest inhabitants were descendants of Ice Age hunters, referred to as "Red Paint People," because of the red clay that they used in most aspects of their culture. Later, the Micmac, Passamaquoddy, Penobscot and Abenaki Indians flourished in the area, evidence of which can be seen in neighboring Damariscotta, where 6,000 years worth of oyster shells piled in massive middens line the banks of the Damariscotta River. There are over one million cubic feet of shells piled up - some of the heaps reached 30 feet high, left from early Native Americans; researchers think that they must have had to eat 35 million bushels of oysters over time to create these middens. Today only the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy tribes remain in the state, living on two reservations north of the resort.

Maine was first settled by Europeans in 1607, though it is believed that John Cabot may have explored the coast during the 1400's. Fort Popham (which is open to the public) was the area's first settlement, established by the Plymouth Company. Popham was actually settled the same year as Jamestown, Virginia, which is credited as America's first permanent settlement since initially, the Popham colony didn't survive due to Maine's harsh winters. Although a number of settlements were established over the years, only about a half dozen of them were able to survive the harsh climate. It wasn't until the 1800's that the population began to increase. In 1820 Maine separated from Massachusetts to become its own state, even though the uncertainty of the area's ownership continued to be cause for dispute between England and France. Following the French and Indian Wars and the Revolutionary War, Maine began to prosper significantly, the lumber and maritime industries being particularly successful. During the Civil War, the state was largely abolitionist, and Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in nearby Brunswick, having a huge effect on the North's anti-slavery sentiment. The state continued to flourish until the Great Depression when the economy halted throughout the nation, though during the second half of the 20th century Maine recovered as it became profitable in tourism and sought to find a balance between resource-based industry and environmental protection.

Throughout the subsequent years, Maine has developed a wealth of fascinating history, a great deal of which relates significantly to us in the midcoast. Following are some interesting tid-bits about our region.

It used to be that you couldn't mention our neighbor across the bridge, Wiscasset, without mentioning *Hesper & Luther Little*, the country's last intact four-masted wooden cargo schooners. These two lovely examples of maritime history were actually purchased at auction in 1932 for \$600 each by entrepreneur Frank W. Winter, who brought them to Wiscasset planning to use them to haul lumber to Boston. Unfortunately, after Winter's death, the ships were abandoned, remaining here on the shore of the Sheepscot River until 1998, by which point the elements had reduced them to nothing but derelict remains and they had to be removed. Until that point, the two historic ships were ever-popular for tourists and photographers who admired the nostalgia the boats presented. Even though the ships' remains are gone, you can still find artwork and postcards portraying them.

Directly down the road from the resort is the "Marie Antoinette House," which has an incredibly interesting history attached to it, according to local legend and documents found in the house's attic. During the French Revolution, after Louis XVII was beheaded, Marie Antoinette was imprisoned and awaiting her own execution in Paris, where Captain Stephen Clough of Wiscasset often conducted shipping business. On one journey, Clough's ship, the *Sally*, was overtaken by a French man-o-war and impounded. A bargain was met when Clough was introduced to Tom Paine, Tallyrand, and the Chevalier de Rougeville, all supporters of the Queen; the Chevalier would have the *Sally* released if Clough agreed to be part of a plan to free Marie Antoinette. Being sympathetic of the Queen's plight, Clough agreed and word was sent to his wife instructing her to prepare their home in Maine to accommodate the Queen. Many of the queen's possessions were loaded onto the *Sally*, including vases, clocks, tapestries and six royal Persian cats.

It is thought that there was a sudden outburst of violence when it turned out that their plan had been discovered and Clough, forced to leave the Queen behind, had to make sail with all haste to escape repercussions for his part in the attempted rescue. With him went the Queen's possessions and the six cats still in his care; it is assumed by many that the queen's cats bred with American cats, resulting in the origin of the famous "Maine Coon Cat," known to be a large, rugged cat with a longhaired coat, and of course, the tell-tale "M" on its forehead. The legend surrounding the house has also served as an explanation for the appearance of several rare French antiques that have been spotted around coastal Maine for generations. The details to the story are, as with any legend, inconsistent, but it is true that Clough was a supporter of the queen and did conduct business in Paris during the time of the Revolution, and his house, which originally stood on Westport Island, was moved by boat here to Edgcomb in 1838. It is also true that a piece of the robe the Queen wore at the time of her execution was found in the attic of Clough's home with an attached inscription saying, "this was taken from the dress which Queen Marie Antoinette wore at her execution, by an eye witness, Captain Stephen Clough." We may never know all the truths of this tale, but it is worth a visit to the house, which is a fine example of historic architecture nonetheless.

Also down the road from us is Old Fort Edgcomb, built in 1808 to protect Wiscasset Harbor from possible English hostility resulting from the Embargo Act. The octagonal garrison is one of the best preserved forts in the country. There are guided tours during the summer months.

Maine is, of course, well-known for its tradition of ship-building; Bath, a few miles south of Edgcomb, is without a doubt the area's best-known contributor to the industry. Since the 1700's, Bath has been home to several successful ship-building businesses; proud of this heritage, Bath's Maine Maritime Museum preserved the Percy & Small Shipyard, a producer of wooden vessels, exactly as it was for hundreds of years (the museum is open year-round and has a number of other maritime-related exhibits). The town is also home to Bath Iron Works (BIW), Maine's largest private employer, which has been in business for over 100 years. BIW has a proud history of making seaworthy vessels for the U.S. Navy. During World War II BIW built more ships than the entire Japanese Navy did, launching a new ship every 17 days.

Alna, a few minutes' drive from the resort, is home to the Wiscasset, Waterville, and Farmington Railway Museum; WW&F was a narrow-gauge common carrier railroad that was operational from 1894 until 1933. It was hoped that the line could be used during the Depression to revive the seaport by connecting it with other railroads. The line ran from Wiscasset in the south to Winslow in the north, though it was never actually extended to Waterville or Farmington since the company's ownership passed through a succession of hands who couldn't seem to make the business a success. The final owner was Frank Winter (yes, the same man who had purchased *Hesper & Luther Little*), who ended up selling most of the freighters and the track's rail-lines for scrap when he realized he wasn't having any luck with the line either. In 1985, after the railway had long been left for useless, Harry Percival purchased the land and one of the remaining engines and began to reconstruct the original mainline track. He also founded the museum with hopes of preserving a piece of area history; the museum, which has grown considerably, now exhibits an extensive collection of narrow-gauge railway engines and artifacts and offers rides on the vintage steamer.

A walk down Wiscasset's Federal Street will lead you to the old Lincoln County Jail Museum - built in 1811, it housed prisoners until 1954 when the Thomaston Jail replaced it. Early prisoners were generally French sailors arrested for piracy and privateering or British POW's seized during the War of 1812. During the 1900's the prison was mainly occupied by local miscreants or Prohibition violators. Today the prison's first and second floor cells remain unchanged and visitors can view interesting prisoner graffiti adorning the walls including drawings of a navigational map of the world and a detailed ship and even bits of poetry! The Museum is open June- October (October - May by appointment only).

In nearby Bristol, you can visit the Pemaquid Lighthouse and Colonial Pemaquid at Fort William Henry, two sites very reflective of Maine's history. The Lighthouse, standing at the tip of beautiful Pemaquid Point, was commissioned in 1827 by John Quincy Adams. When it was first built, the structure was lit by a parabolic reflector (with candles and mirrors) and only provided visibility up to two miles. In 1856 the light was converted to a Fresnel lens, providing much improved visibility, and the keeper's house was built flanking the light in 1857. Maine residents voted in 2003 to have the Pemaquid Lighthouse featured on the back of the newly minted state quarters. Colonial Pemaquid at Fort William Henry, down the road from the Lighthouse and situated on the edge of the Pemaquid River, has lovely harbor views, making it a great spot for a picnic or to bring your dog for a swim. Aside from that, Colonial Pemaquid has been part of generations of Maine's history; the site was found, upon archeological research, to have been the location of many settlements, dating back as early as Viking times. During digs of the property, it was discovered that over the years the land had also been used as Wabenaki settlement, a fishing village, a trading post, and in its latest years, a war-fort; excavations also revealed building foundations from the 1600's. There is now a museum on the property displaying several artifacts that were found during digs, including arrowheads, pot shards, snuff boxes, Delftware, pipes and musket balls. Fort William Henry and the adjacent Fort House are the property's most well-preserved structures and they can also be toured by the public. The fort was originally built of wood as Fort Charles in 1677 but fell to an Indian attack in 1689. Fort William Henry was built to replace Fort Charles; the new fort was built of stone and though it had numerous gun ports and thick, high walls, Fort William Henry succumbed during the French & Indian Wars to attackers who destroyed it in 1696. Fort Frederick replaced Fort William Henry in 1729 but was dismantled in 1775 so that the British wouldn't be able to use during the American Revolution. In 1908 historian John Cartland reconstructed the tower and outer walls of Fort William Henry's remains using many of the original stones. The Fort House next-door, built during the late 1700's, was used mainly as a farm house; today the restored building serves as an archaeology lab and artifact storage space.

If you are an art lover, downtown Rockland is an ideal spot to visit, for it has a number of art galleries and is home to the renowned Farnsworth Art Museum. The Farnsworth holds a nationally recognized collection of historic American art as well as famed works by the Wyeths. The museum campus also has an extensive library and two historic buildings that are furnished as they were when they were lived in during the Victorian Era. They also sell passes to the famous Olson House (right outside Rockland in Cushing), where artist Andrew Wyeth painted "Christina's World," the poignant portrait of his crippled friend Christina Olson dragging herself through the field beside the house; there, you can see why Wyeth so favored the spot for the subject of many of his works while learning more about him and the Olson family.

Perhaps the best place to visit regarding Maine's history is the Maine State Museum, which features exhibits devoted to the state's prehistoric origins, agriculture, archaeology and more; their historic collection also features a wide array of archival materials, including journals, newspapers and photographs. In addition, there are collections displaying examples of Maine's natural and geological resources; you can view everything from the gorgeous gemstones that come from the area's deposits, to specimens of Maine's nature and wildlife.



Damariscotta's Oyster Shell Middens, 1886, when they stood up to 30 feet tall!



Hesper & Luther Little, moored at their final resting place in Wiscasset Harbor.



Fort Edgecomb, Eddy Road, Edgecomb



Fort William Henry at Colonial Pemaquid, Bristol



"Marie Antoinette House," Eddy Road, Edgecomb



The house at 63 Federal St in Brunswick, where Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.



Pemaquid Lighthouse, Bristol



Fort Popham, Phippsburg



Restored vintage engine progressing down WW&F's rebuilt narrow-gauge track, Alna



The Olson House in Cushing, where artist Andrew Wyeth painted his best known work, *Christina's World*.



Christina's World, by Andrew Wyeth... that's the Olson House in the background of the painting