

## Historic & Archeological Resources

### Conditions & Trends

- (1) *The community's Comprehensive Planning Historic Preservation Data Set prepared and provided to the community by the Historic Preservation Commission, and the Office, or their designees.*

There are 18 known prehistoric archaeological sites in Bowdoinham. Most of them are located along tidal water or on riverbanks. Orange highlight areas on planning map (dated September 2010 are still current/useful) show areas of professional archaeological survey. See the map titled Known Archaeological Sites and Areas Sensitive for Prehistoric Archaeology in Bowdoinham, prepared by the Maine State Historic Preservation Commission.

A probable prehistoric fish weir consisting of wooden stakes preserved in intertidal mud has been located in a shallow portion of Merrymeeting Bay. This site (Maine Archaeological Survey number 25.61) is significant and highlights the possibility of preservation of wooden or perishable artifacts. The Maine State Historic Preservation Commission notes that the banks of the Cathance, Abagadassett, and Kennebec Rivers, and the river floodplain soils in the Bowdoinham Wildlife Management Area are likely locations for prehistoric archaeological sites, and should be surveyed.

The next table lists identified historic sites in Bowdoinham as recorded by the Maine State Historic Preservation Commission.

<b>Know Historic Archaeological Sites in Bowdoinham</b>				
<b>Site Name</b>	<b>Site Number</b>	<b>Site Type</b>	<b>Periods of Significance</b>	<b>Nat'l Register Status</b>
Gyles Settlement	ME049-001	settlement	1620 - 1675 (1669 - 1676)	undetermined
Somerset Settlement	ME049-002	settlement	circa 1719	undetermined
McCurdie's Point	ME049-003	shipyard	18th and 19th Centuries	undetermined
<i>Richard</i> (vessel)	ME049-004	wreck, sloop	9/20/1923	undetermined
Cathance River #1	ME049-005	farmstead	19th Century	undetermined
Cathance River #2	ME049-006	farmstead	19th Century	undetermined
Richard Collacott	ME049-007	trading post	1658(?) - 1676	undetermined
Ebenezer F. Whitney	ME049-008	farmstead	circa 1839 - 1900	undetermined
Brooks Carding Mill	ME049-009	mill, carding and gristmill	circa 1800 - 1950s	Eligible
E. Robbins	ME049-010	domestic	1826 - late-1940 - early-1950s	undetermined
J. Hall Cellar and Cemetery	ME049-011	domestic and cemetery	pre-1828 - post-1936	undetermined
Jefferson farmstead	ME049-012	farmstead	mid-late 19 <sup>th</sup> century farmstead	undetermined
Browns Point historic fish weir	ME059-013	weir	3 radiocarbon dates on wooden stakes calibrate 70% probability between 1811 and 1912 AD	Possibly eligible

Source: Maine State Historic Preservation Commission, October 2023.

No professional town-wide surveys for historic archaeological sites have been conducted to date in Bowdoinham. The Maine State Historic Preservation Commission recommends that future archaeological survey should focus on the identification of potentially significant resources associated with the Town’s agricultural, residential, and industrial heritage, particularly those associated with the earliest Euro-American settlement of the Town in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Five buildings in Bowdoinham are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, as shown in the next table.

<b>Bowdoinham Historic Buildings on the National Register of Historic Places</b>
1. Cornish House, Main Street
2. Robert P. Carr House, Main Street
3. Viola Coombs House, Main Street
4. Harward Family House, Pork Point Road
5. Butterfield-Sampson House, River Road

Source: Maine State Historic Preservation Commission, October 2023

The Maine State Historic Preservation Commission notes that a comprehensive survey of Bowdoinham's historic above-ground resources needs to be conducted in order to identify other properties that may be eligible for nomination to the National Register.

- (2) *An outline of the community's history, including a brief description of historic settlement patterns and events contributing to the development and character of the community and its surroundings.*

The Town of Bowdoinham was incorporated September 18, 1762, as the 14th Town in the District of Maine. Trappers, fishermen, surveyors, and timber cruisers peopled the area, at least seasonally, as early as 1630.

Permanent settlers arrived in the 1730's, shortly after the end of the Maine Indian wars. The first settlers lived on the fringes of Merrymeeting Bay and its tributary rivers. They were farmers and fishermen first, working to push the woods back. A 1795 map of "old" Bowdoinham offers a handwritten comment from its surveyor/editor: "there are yet no real roads in this town... passage is mostly by water."

Bowdoinham, in those early days before Maine's statehood, included all of present-day Richmond (White's Landing) a part of Topsham (Cathance Neck) and a large part of present-day Bowdoin (West Bowdoinham). Since 1823, Bowdoinham's boundaries have remained essentially unchanged, stretching some eight miles along the western shore of Merrymeeting Bay and the Kennebec River, then inland due west nearly five miles.

Today’s Bowdoinham Village, or Cathance Landing, was settled about 1800. A toll bridge spanned the Cathance by 1805, and the tidewater landing developed into a bustling center for trade in less than a decade. The landlocked, developing towns of Bowdoin, Litchfield, Webster, Wales, even Lisbon and Lewiston found “the Landing” to be quick and easy access to tidewater, and the sailing vessels that plied the Atlantic coast.

Bowdoinham became one of the earliest shipbuilding centers in a State that became known as a "Ship building State." Vessels of wood were constructed at Bowdoinham a decade before the

American Revolution, and during the next 125 years, more than 250 vessels of all class and tonnage were built here.

The decades before the American Civil War brought the town unparalleled prosperity. Warehouses, chandlers, icehouses, mills, stores, and shipyards lined both shores of the Cathance. Boarding houses, two hotels, several taverns, private estates and more than two dozen shops, businesses and manufacturing operations shared frontage on the Town's steep Main Street with private homes, churches and civic clubs.

In its 1850 census, the Town's population reached 2,382. But the decade following the Civil War triggered an economic decline in Bowdoinham and other parts of the north and east. Many young men went to and were wounded or killed in the war, while many more followed the rivers and railroads south and west when the conflict was done. The Town's only bank was robbed in 1867; more than \$73,000 was taken and never recovered.

Bowdoinham's smaller, wooden ships became obsolete, her yards too small to compete. The town which helped to foster the state's maritime industry had to stand helplessly aside, watching her seamen and master builders move to towns with wider rivers and the ability to build bigger ships. By 1890, Bowdoinham had reverted to what it had been in its earliest days, a small, independent, agricultural-based community of self-sufficient family farms. Residents produced apples, hay, wheat and potatoes, some sheep, poultry, and beef, or worked in small shops. They harvested fish and ice from the rivers, and wood from the forests. The Kendall Brothers came to town and their successful fertilizer, sheep, and grain business became known across the state.

In 1902, a mid-December fire raged largely unchecked through Bowdoinham's downtown commercial center, destroying almost all of it. Dozens of shops, homes, and warehouses were leveled. Fire struck the downtown area again in 1904, taking out another section of the town's center. Most of Bowdoinham's commerce, and much of her historical village center, were lost in these misfortunes.

After the global depression of the 1930's, Bowdoinham's population sank to a modern low of 904 people.

At the end of World War II, Bowdoinham rode the success of its neighboring towns to make gains of its own. Today, her population has grown steadily to 3,047 residents. Bowdoinham has become a "bedroom town," with industry and fortunes tied to our neighbors. Our history, made even more remote by these recent changes, has become all the more precious, even more worthy of preservation.

*(3) An inventory of the location, condition, and use of any historical or archaeological resource that is of local importance.*

In addition to the prehistoric and historic sites noted above by the Maine State Historic Preservation Commission, the Town has at least 48 cemeteries, some public, some private some have financial support, most do not. See the map titled Public Facilities and Services for the public cemetery locations. Additional buildings and structures of local historic importance are shown in the next table.

<b>Historic Buildings and Structures in Bowdoinham of Local Importance that are NOT on the National Register of Historic Places</b>			
<b>Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Condition</b>	<b>Use</b>
Town Hall	School St	Poor - Structural Work Needed	Inactive
John C. Coombs Municipal Building	School St	Fair	Active
Merrymeeting Grange	Main St	Fair	Active

*(4) A brief description of threats to local historic resource and to those of state and national significance as identified by the Maine Historic Preservation Commission.*

Development and accompanying excavation and re-grading activities may disturb prehistoric and historic sites and artifacts. Detailed archaeological surveys prioritized for shoreland areas could reduce this risk by informing developers and the planning board where such assets are located. As noted in the Analyses section above, ordinance provisions for site plan review, subdivision and shoreland zoning are meant to protect historic and archeological resources from new development. There are no ordinance standards to protect historic buildings and structures from being altered beyond recognition or razed.

Analysis

*(1) Are historic patterns of settlement still evident in the community?*

The Bowdoinham village area retains many of its historic buildings: civic, commercial, residential, and religious. The streets converge on the village following in many instances the original road alignments and pathways through the surrounding hillsides, fields and along waterways. The density of development in the village area also continues to reflect early traditional development in which buildings were sited close together on small lots.

*(2) What protective measures currently exist for historic and archaeological resources and are they effective?*

Most known historic and archeological resources in Bowdoinham are located within shoreland areas. One of the purposes of the shoreland zoning districts is, “to protect archaeological and historic resources.” Shoreland zoning provisions note, “A permit is not required for an archaeological excavation as long as the excavation is conducted by an archaeologist listed on the State Historic Preservation Officer’s level 1 or level 2 approved list, and unreasonable erosion and sedimentation is prevented by means of adequate and timely temporary and permanent stabilization measures.” Shoreland zoning development approval criteria includes, “Will not have an adverse effect on historic and/or archaeological sites.”

The Town believes that its ordinance provisions are effective in protecting historic and archeological resources from new development. However, Bowdoinham does not have design requirements specific to the preservation or historically accurate renovation of historic buildings and structures. Ordinance provisions for site plan regulated development and subdivisions are noted in response to the next question.

- (3) *Do local site plan and/or subdivision regulations require applicants proposing development in areas that may contain historic or archaeological resources to conduct a survey for such resources?*

Archeological or historic surveys are not explicitly defined in the Land Use Ordinance. However, Tier III projects require a site inventory and analysis, which includes identifying the location of, "...historic and/ or archaeological resources, together with a description of such features." Likewise, subdivision inventory and analysis requires identifying, "Locations of all culturally, historically or archaeologically significant buildings, features, or sites." These requirements may be waived by the planning board.

Subdivision, site plan review, and general performance standards include historic and archaeological provisions for development on sites identified as containing historic or archaeological resources by the Maine Historic Preservation Commission and require, "appropriate measures for protecting these resources, including but not limited to, modification of the proposed design of the site, timing of construction, and limiting the extent of excavation." Furthermore, subdivisions and proposed developments that have buildings or sites on the National Register of Historic Places or are adjacent to such sites must, "minimize the impacts on the historic features. When the historic features to be protected include buildings, the placement and the architectural design of new structures in the subdivision shall be similar to the historic structures. The Board may require the applicant to seek the advice of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission."

- (4) *Have significant historic resources fallen into disrepair, and are there ways the community can provide incentives to preserve their value as an historical resource?*

Most significant historic resources in Bowdoinham are in adequate to fair condition. The following historic properties are in substandard or blighted condition: Ridge Road Church. Property owners could use historic preservation tax credits (Federal and State) to reduce the costs to redevelop old buildings for new uses while maintaining their historical appeal.

The Town Hall is also in poor condition. The Town Hall Preservation Committee has been leading the charge to promote the building as an asset to the community through the creation of a video project and through fundraising. They have also commissioned an architectural study which identified the various defects in the building including critical repairs to the foundation and the roof of upwards of \$1,000,000. At the 2023 Town Meeting the town was not able to garner the support to make a substantial investment in the building at that time. In 2023, the building was listed as one of the top ten most endangered historic places to preserve by the Maine Preservation. However, the committee continues working on developing a plan to save the building, which includes looking for grant money and using local sweat equity.

Additional local efforts to preserve and restore historic resources could be undertaken by town-appointed committees and by volunteer groups. The Bowdoinham Historical Society gathered the largest single collection of records, photographs, and artifacts relating to the town, managed to

index at least 48 of the cemeteries that exist in Bowdoinham, and fostered the publication of 14 historical feature newspapers called the Bowdoinham Advertiser. The attention of the Bowdoinham Historical Society to the Town's history coupled with its many social, community-building activities and events make the Society a vital promoter of the Town's future as well as its past.