

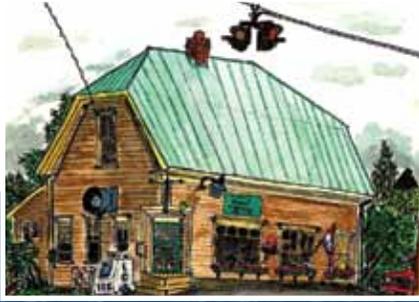
# Bowdoinham

*"The Craftiest Town in Maine"*

- Down East Magazine Nov. 2008



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# Bowdoinham

THE TOWN OF BOWDOINHAM WAS SETTLED IN 1725 AND INCORPORATED ON SEPTEMBER 18, 1862 AS THE 17TH TOWN IN THE STATE OF MAINE. BOWDOINHAM HAS A POPULATION OF 2,770 AND A TOTAL AREA OF 22,176 ACRES. THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT IS TOWN MEETING/ BOARD OF SELECTPERSONS/TOWN MANAGER.



### **Bowdoinham Town Office**

John C. Coombs Municipal Building  
13 School Street, Bowdoinham, ME  
[www.bowdoinham.com](http://www.bowdoinham.com)  
Phone (207) 666-5531  
Fax (207) 666-5532



### **Bowdoinham Public Library**

John C. Coombs Municipal Building  
13 School Street  
[www.bowdoinham.lib.me.us](http://www.bowdoinham.lib.me.us)  
Phone (207) 666-8405

### **Library Hours:**

Tuesday: 10:00 am to 12:00 pm,  
2:00 pm to 5:00 pm, 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm  
Wednesday 2:00 pm to 6:00 pm  
Friday: 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm  
Saturday: 10:00 am to 3:00 pm

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Margaret Muir - [www.brycemuir.com](http://www.brycemuir.com)

**Jane Page-Conway**/Fine Art Photography

13 Wildes Road, Bowdoinham ME 04008 - 666-3631

**Additional Photography Credits: Tony Cox and Slade Moore**



# WELCOME TO Bowdoinham



Bowdoinham, Maine is a very pleasant and prosperous village on the banks of the Cathance River and Merrymeeting Bay, 14 miles inland from the Atlantic Ocean. Its proximity to Interstate 295, Brunswick, Topsham, Lewiston, Auburn, Augusta, and Portland make it an ideal place to live, visit, or locate a business. The town strives to develop and attract sustainable businesses that will reflect the high quality of life and strong sense of community that Bowdoinham is known for. Main Street is home to several vibrant businesses including a general store, seasonal farmers market, and a restaurant. The recent addition of new sidewalks makes the village a great place to walk, meet new neighbors, and see old friends. Bowdoinham has a rich agricultural history and is currently the home to many very successful traditional and organic farms. This resurgence in farming brings young farming families to town and great food to the Southern Midcoast of Maine. Named the “Craftiest Town in Maine” by DownEast Magazine in 2008, Bowdoinham is home to many well-known artists whose work is a direct reflection of the natural beauty of the area. In the Cathance Landing Building on the waterfront you will find the Merrymeeting Arts Center, the center of Bowdoinham’s “Creative Economy”.

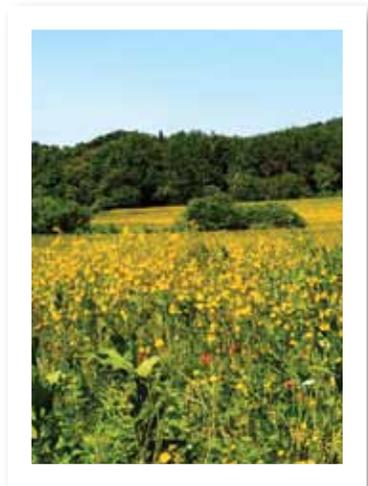
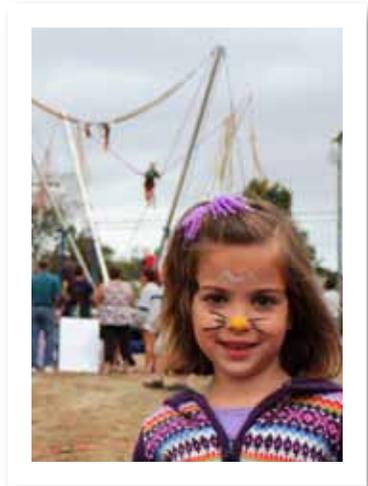
Up on the hill, in the old high school building, you will find one of the best little libraries in the state and the historic town hall where visitors gather for contra dances, art shows and the longest-running plant sale in the state.

The Bowdoinham Community School is a top-ranking K-5 elementary school built mainly from donated lumber and labor along with money raised from several years of local chicken barbeques. Bordering the school, kids and adults can be seen enjoying the baseball fields, a skating rink, a tennis court and a basketball court.

In the center of town, Mailly Waterfront Park features an easily accessible public boat launch, picnic tables, a gazebo and hiking trails. During the summer, the park is home to free Sunday concerts sponsored by the town. A short boat ride will find you in the middle of Merrymeeting Bay, an ecological wonder and world famous duck hunting territory. If you continue further down the Kennebec, past the city of Bath, you will find yourself in the Atlantic Ocean. In the winter, fishing shacks appear in the river by the village center, continuing down the river and into the bay. Visitors and locals gather to fish for the small and delicious Atlantic Smelt. Once a year, the townspeople come together in the park during the second week of September to “Celebrate” its birthday. Celebrate Bowdoinham is a celebration

of Bowdoinham history, culture, arts, ecology, agriculture, commerce and the wonderful people that live here and call Bowdoinham home. In 2012 Bowdoinham will celebrate its 250th birthday with special celebrations throughout the year (See pages 10 and 11).

Visit [www.bowdoinham.com](http://www.bowdoinham.com) to learn more about living and working in Bowdoinham.





# HISTORY OF Bowdoinham



Though the 1600's saw attempts at settlement, it was not until 1730 that permanent settlers, many with names still common in Bowdoinham, built along the shores of Merrymeeting Bay and the Abagadasset River. On September 18, 1762, Bowdoinham was incorporated, named for Peter Bowdoin, a religious refugee from France, who had bought the tract of land that included this area. The first church was built in 1765, and three school districts were authorized in 1791.

At one point Bowdoinham stretched from the Richmond-Gardiner line to the Topsham line and west to include Bowdoin. 1788 saw Bowdoin incorporate as a separate town, and Cathance Neck chose to join Topsham in 1789.

It was not until 1805, when the first bridge was built across the Cathance, that the village became more than a landing. By 1810 Bowdoinham had a post office; by 1818 it was a thriving community, and shipyards lined the Cathance with access along the Kennebec to the shores of Merrymeeting Bay. Bowdoinham's first vessel, the sloop Merrymeeting, built in 1768, started an industry that was vital to the town for over 100 years; Nearly 250 vessels were built before steam and

size made our sailing vessels obsolete. In 1854 Bowdoinham sent more vessels to sea than even Bath, and in 1877 launched its largest, the Sea King.

With Richmond's incorporation in 1823 and the return of Cathance Neck in 1830, Bowdoinham achieved its current boundaries. In 1850 the railroad arrived and Bowdoinham's population peaked at 2382, necessitating 18 schools. At this time another industry began, harvesting clear Kennebec ice and sending it, packed in sawdust in the holds of Bowdoinham ships, all over the world. In 1886 Bowdoinham had 24 ice companies.

237 Bowdoinham men served in the Civil War. Soon after, in 1867, four brigands robbed the Village Bank, taking nearly \$80,000, a loss that devastated the town.

Merrymeeting Bay and her four Bowdoinham rivers always played a crucial role in the life of Bowdoinham. Saw mills, grist mills, a carding machine, a plaster mill and J.P. Kendall's innovative tide mill harnessed her rivers. By 1890 the many ducks and geese on the Bay supported market gunning, providing large numbers of ducks for big city tables. Sturgeon, shad, and smelt were also caught and sent to the city. In 1880 Kendall's sons established Sagadahoc Fertilizer and later Long Branch Sheep Farm, for a time the largest sheep farm east of the Mississippi.

On December 14, 1902 fire destroyed much of the business section of Bowdoinham, followed in March

1904 by another fire that burned still more. Nonetheless, in 1912 a splendid celebration of Bowdoinham's 150th was held, and Coombs High School was dedicated. The 1930s saw a rise in recreational waterfowl hunting with local men serving as guides for 'sports' from away.

In 1946 it was decided to send students elsewhere for high school, and in 1954 citizens of Bowdoinham joined to build a new elementary school, funding it with volunteer labor, donated materials, and money raised at the annual Bowdoinham Fourth of July Barbecue. With its opening, the last two one-room schools were closed.

In 1962 Bowdoinham marked its 200th birthday with a celebration gala. The well-known Bowdoinham Library Plant sale was first held in 1974 and has been repeated annually ever since. In 1992 our pioneer recycling barn was opened and remains a treasured aspect of Bowdoinham life.

Bowdoinham has recently become home to a number of artists and crafts people: sculptors, painters, writers, photographers, metal workers, furniture makers, and fiber artists. Recent years have seen a resurgence of commercial farmers and a farmers market. There is a diverse range of recreational opportunities for both children and adults. The town's birthday is celebrated with a September community festival each year; 2012 will be our 250th. Bowdoinham's history has indeed been rich and varied.

# HISTORICAL BUILDINGS IN Bowdoinham



## 1700's:

- Preble/Thirwall House - (Pork Point Rd.)  
reputed to be oldest in town
- Fulton/Fenimore House (Bay Rd.)
- Purington/Lilly/Cummins/  
Alberg House (Bay Rd.)
- Harward House/Ferdico - (Pork Point Rd.)

## 1800's:

- Maxwell House (Pork Point Rd.)
- Gray Estate (corner of Main &  
Bridge Streets)
- Brick Store (N.H. Macomber Store;  
Rideout Store; Credit Union;  
Long Branch School of Maine)

## •••• Town Hall (Union Church 1823, converted to Town Hall 1882)

- Baptist Church
- Ridge Church

## ••••• Jellerson School (only remaining one-room school house)

- Cornish/Frizzle/Brinsmade-Cary House  
(Upper Main St.)
- Old School Baptist Church (BHS  
Meeting House, Rt 24 & Browns Point Rd.)
- Nazarene Church



## 1900's:

- RA Dickinson Store/The Town Landing
- Masonic Hall
- Grange Hall
- Knights of Pythias Building
- Cannon - Civil War memorial  
(from Fort Popham)
- Coombs High School

## •••• Green Bridge over Cathance River

- Bowdoinham Community School



# CHURCHES IN Bowdoinham



## **Bowdoinham Second Baptist Church**

1 Church Street  
Bowdoinham, ME 04008  
[www.bowdoinhamsecondbaptist.org](http://www.bowdoinhamsecondbaptist.org)  
[pastorjon1@comcast.net](mailto:pastorjon1@comcast.net)  
Phone: 207-666-5523

## **Church of the Nazarene**

Corner of Main Street and School Street  
Bowdoinham, ME 04008  
[danjoyce999666@yahoo.com](mailto:danjoyce999666@yahoo.com)  
Phone: 207-666-5575



# 250<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF Bowdoinham

VISITORS WELCOME TO A YEARLONG CELEBRATION!



Major anniversaries are always exciting and 2012 will be full of special events celebrating the 250th anniversary of the Town of Bowdoinham. From the Fire Department and the Bowdoinham Community School to the Bowdoinham Historical Society, every community group and business in town will be participating in this celebration.

The yearlong festivities will have a number of key events. Also, memorabilia and commemorative items are being created to feature this historic milestone. The planning committee has used historical anniversary documents from 1912 and 1962 for ideas and precedents. The events and products will be as varied as the 150th and 200th celebrations, and more exciting as time has added to the community in many ways.

The details and updated list of events can be found on the web at [www.bowdoinham250.org](http://www.bowdoinham250.org) as well as a wonderful historical slide show created by Ann Hartzler. Additional information may be found at the Town of Bowdoinham Office. Be sure to check the schedule often and help us celebrate 250 wonderful years!

## 2012 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### **Early February**

Smelt fishing -Ice Cutting Festival with  
Best Beard Contest as in 1962

### **April**

Town Cleanup and Cemetery Restoration Day

### **May 19**

Bowdoinham Plant Sale with historical displays and tours

### **June 23**

Red-White-Blue Festival with Chicken Bar-B-Q  
Original Drama by local students and historians

### **July and August**

Merrymetting Arts Center Exhibit: Bryce Muir, Carlo Pittore and Carter Smith

### **September 7, 8 and 9**

3 DAY CELEBRATE BOWDOINHAM FESTIVAL  
Fireman's Muster

### **November 12**

Veterans Day Celebration

### **November 20**

Ladies Auxiliary Pie Sale

### **Cruise-In on The Cathance**

June 30, July 28 and August 25

*Check for changes and additions on the web at  
[www.bowdoinham250.org](http://www.bowdoinham250.org) or [www.bowdoinham.com](http://www.bowdoinham.com)*

## MEMORABILIA AND COMMEMORATIVE ITEMS TO INCLUDE:

Cookbook by EMS

250th Anniversary Commemorative Book by Bowdoinham Historical Society

Anniversary Commemorative Quilt

250th Anniversary Commemorative Plate

Memory Project in video and text

Historical Markers for Town Cemeteries, Historic Buildings and Sites

Historical, Cultural and Environmental Maps

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BOWDOINHAM

# Community School



FIRST OPENED ITS DOORS IN 1955, BUILT IN PART WITH MONEY RAISED BY THE ANNUAL FOURTH OF JULY CHICKEN BARBEQUES.

At that time it was a grade five through eight school with four classrooms. Twice the school has expanded its footprint to meet the growing needs of the community. The third to fifth grade wing and gymnasium were added in the early 1970's, and then the kindergarten through second grade wing was added in 1991.

Currently, the enrollment at Bowdoinham Community School is a little over two hundred students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. The school has a staff of just over thirty employees. "Community" is in the name for a reason. There is a lot of activity that extends beyond the typical school day. Scouts, recreational

sports, and walking the indoor route are just some of the events you could find going on after school hours. Another exciting community connection is the Arts Alive grades three through five electives program, which brings talented artists from throughout the town into the school to enhance the students' educational experiences. The Harvest Supper occurs each year in the fall in which the students in the Food Freaks program cook and serve food they grew in the school's garden. Thanks to the Ferrier Scholarship, the school will be putting on a play this year highlighting the schools events and the history of Bowdoinham.

The Bowdoinham community school is located at 22 Cemetery Road, within walking distance of the

village center. The school is part of MSAD #75, which also includes the towns of Topsham, Bowdoin, and Harpswell. The Mt. Ararat Middle School and High School are located in neighboring Topsham.



# BOWDOINHAM

# Arts & Crafts



BOWDOINHAM IS HOME TO MANY WELL-KNOWN ARTISTS WHOSE WORK IS A DIRECT REFLECTION OF THE NATURAL BEAUTY OF THE AREA.

In The Cathance Landing building on the waterfront you will find the Merrymeeting Arts Center, the center of Bowdoinham’s “creative economy.” The Merrymeeting Arts Center encourages art, education, and community, celebrating the cultural heritage and natural environment of Merrymeeting Bay. Located in two buildings overlooking the Cathance River, the center offers diverse educational activities and exhibits throughout the year. The center houses a revolving exhibit of works by Bryce Muir, in whose spirit the center was founded.

One block up the hill is the newly formed Long Branch School of Maine and General Store. The school teaches traditional skills and modern innovations to provide people with the knowledge they need to live sustainably. In addition to carrying books, tools and supplies for the students, the general store will feature

local arts and crafts from the school's instructors as well as other local artists.

The Center for Ecological and Cultural Living Arts (CECLA) is a burgeoning community of farmers, ecologists, musicians, and others dedicated to honoring, protecting and enriching Maine's unique agricultural, ecological and cultural history and resources. CECLA is dedicated to practicing, teaching and celebrating community-based ecological and cultural living arts.

In December of every year, The Bowdoinham Guild of Artisans, a group of local artists and craftspeople dedicated to fostering excellence in fine arts and crafts, hold their annual sale in the historic Town Hall. For two days, the hall is filled with music and a sampling of the diverse artistic abilities of the residents of Bowdoinham.

The Ziggurat Theatre Ensemble, a project of Merrymeeting Arts Center, performs during the summer at the Town Hall. Recently relocated from Los Angeles where they were critically acclaimed, Ziggurat creates performances inspired by world myths and explores ritual as a dramatic form. Its performance style is informed by the varying cultures explored, emphasizing not only the emotional, but also the physical, musical and visual aspects of performance. The theater's

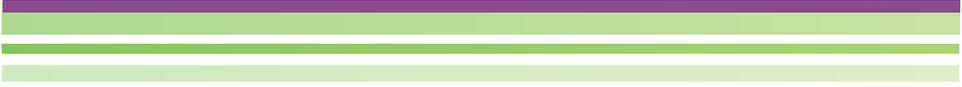
creative work illuminates themes from world mythology, which transcend cultural boundaries by addressing our common experience.

The Bowdoinham Contradance Series is held the 3rd Saturday of each month at the Town Hall. Begun in 1991, the series continues a long tradition of contradancing in the Bowdoinham Town Hall. Some say it's the center of the dancing universe; we simply think it's one of the nicest dance halls in New England. Scrumptious brownies are always served at half-time!!



BOWDOINHAM

# Agriculture



AGRICULTURE HAS HAD A LONG HISTORY IN THE TOWN OF BOWDOINHAM, PRE-DATING THE TOWN'S INCORPORATION IN 1862.

The most fertile, well-drained soils have been used for vegetables and first production, while the less well-drained soils have favored animal raising and hay production.

During the 18th century, 95% of the townspeople raised their own food and fiber and sold the surplus to local people or businesses. By the 19th century, the demands of town and city populations created a larger marketing opportunity to serve the increasing population that no longer had access to farm land.

As evidence of this process, a toll bridge was built in 1834 from Topsham to Mustard Island (in the center of the Androscoggin) to Cooks Corner to give farmers

shorter access to the Bath market. This bridge was maintained until 1896. “Bay Bridge Road” shows the location of this route.

During the 20th century, the production of farms was geared to the wholesale market. Substantial apple orchards; the Kendal Brothers sheep operation and fertilizer business; the Kelley, Prout and Dennison vegetable enterprises; the Millay, Wallace and Curtis dairy farms; the farmers growing for the New Sharon and Waldoboro canning companies; and the hay producers for the Bath and Boston markets were all enterprises selling wholesale.

In Bowdoinham, the last quarter of the 20th century saw the beginning of the change from wholesale marketing to a more intensive focus on retail customers. This initial focus was intensified by the “organic” and “buy local” desires of the Maine population which displays itself in restaurant offerings, summer and winter farmers’ markets, food clubs and “community supported agriculture” programs where members contract with a farm to supply their vegetable or meat supply.

The 21st century has seen a burst of new farm operation start-up in Bowdoinham. Even though farming has a localized retail market Bowdoinham has received statewide notice which bodes well for the future.



BOWDOINHAM

# Woodworking



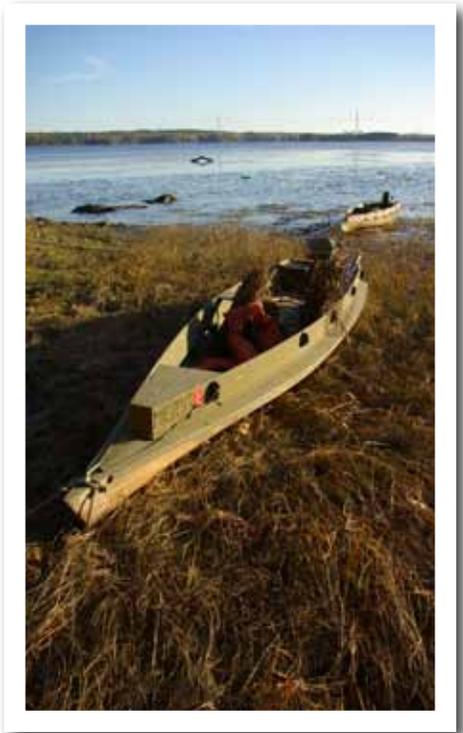
WHEN YOU TAKE INTO ACCOUNT EVERYONE IN TOWN WHO BUILDS HOUSES, TIMBER-FRAME BARNs, KITCHENS, BOATS, KAYAKS, CANOES, THE OCCASIONAL AIRPLANE, FURNITURE, CLOCKS, CHAIRS, VIOLINS, FIDDLES, ARCHITECTURAL MILLWORK, AND LOTS AND LOTS OF FIREWOOD, JUST ABOUT EVERYONE IN THE VILLAGE IS A WOODWORKER.

Bowdoinham's location on Merrymeeting Bay led to the growth of an economy based on a blend of maritime crafts; fishing and boat building, combined with farming, and associated home industry.

If you needed a house or barn built you framed the structure yourself, with the help of friends and neighbors. If you wanted to fish you had to first build

your own boat. To take advantage of Bowdoinham's prime location on the North east flyway, by hunting the multitudes of migrating wildfowl feeding in the Bay, a man had to build a gunning float, carve decoys, and fit out his boat with oars and other gear. Heating the home and cooking everyday meals required cutting, splitting, and handling staggering amounts of firewood.

Bowdoinham has a curious problem. It has been described as the craftiest village in Maine and just about every other person you meet is a craftsman. But, a visitor would be hard pressed to find one. Mainers have a thing about putting oneself forward., so signage is avoided. Folks rely instead on their reputation and word of mouth to bring in work.



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## THE IMPORTANCE OF *Merrymeeting Bay*



*The bay is host to rare and endangered plants and animals including estuary bur-marigold, parker's pipewort, and bald eagles.*

Merrymeeting Bay drains 38% of the freshwater in the state; its watershed comprises an area totaling some 10,000 square miles. The Bay is located in Midcoast Maine at the confluence of six rivers: the Cathance, Muddy, Abbagadasset, Eastern and—two of Maine's largest rivers—the Kennebec and Androscoggin. While generally considered an estuary, biologically, the Bay is classified as tidal riverine and geologically, as an inland delta. The Bay is for all intents and purposes 100% freshwater. Narrow river restrictions at the Chops and Thorne Head slow the incoming salt tide from 17 miles downstream and restrict the outgoing volume of fresh water draining more than a third of the state. It is the backed up freshwater rising 4-6 feet against the advancing salt water that makes the tide. The Kennebec is, in fact, tidal all the way to Augusta.

The Bay is a 9,000 acre system of tidal freshwater marshes and open water that provides premier spawning habitat for all diadromous (needing time in salt and fresh

water to complete their life cycle) fish species of the Gulf of Maine as well as being the largest staging ground in the northeast for migratory waterfowl. The Bay is internationally significant for its many rare and endangered plants and animals including Parker's pipewort, stiff arrowhead, estuary bur-marigold, bald eagles, Atlantic salmon, and shortnose and Atlantic sturgeon.

Historically, the Bay has suffered deleterious impacts from large-scale industrial pollution upstream, dammed rivers, and development pressures along its shores; it is experiencing serious reductions of native fish and other species that make this globally rare habitat their home. Even as iconic bald eagles are returning to nest after the use of DDT nearly forced them to extinction, diadromous fish need safe passage past dams in order to reach historic spawning grounds; both the economic and environmental vitality of the Gulf of Maine depend on this restoration. In spite of numerous environmental tribulations, Merrymeeting Bay remains critical habitat for rare plant and animal species and continues as a vital staging ground for the dwindling population of migratory waterfowl.

Merrymeeting Bay is not only an ecological gem, but also a cultural and historical treasure. Native Americans once utilized the lands around Merrymeeting Bay for its bountiful resources, shelter, and waterways, and somewhat of a cultural divide existed here between the Agrarian



Susquehanna culture to the south and west, and at a slightly different time, the hunter/gatherer/fishermen Red Paint People to the east. In May of 1654, papers were signed at Ashley's Tavern on Thwings Pt. in Woolwich across from East Bowdoinham to form the first European government in the area. The Bay and Kennebec river became home to a large-scale ice industry during the late 1800's and early 1900's. Every spring, ice harvested from Dresden, Richmond, Bowdoinham and other communities along the Kennebec between here and Augusta was shipped as far away as India. Many residents are unaware of the archeological and historical value of the Bay or that Bowdoinham has more frontage on the Bay than any other town.



# DOWNTOWN Bowdoinham





## UNIQUE INHABITANTS *of Merrymeeting Bay*



*Maine wildlife is abundant in the Bay and features internationally significant population of birds, rare mud plants, and migratory fish.*

Merrymeeting Bay is probably best known for its duck hunting. Although migratory waterfowl populations are but a shadow of what they were even 50 years ago, the Bay is still considered the largest fall staging ground north of the Chesapeake for ducks moving south along the Atlantic flyway in the fall. On most of the Bay's extensive freshwater mudflats, wild rice grows to 8 feet tall. So too grow river bulrush, narrow-leaved cattail, celery grass, pickerelweed, yellow pond lily and a host of other plant species that provide much needed food and shelter for birds with a long journey ahead.

### **OUR FEATHERED FRIENDS**

Earle Browne, who once lived on and hunted from Brown's Point used to say if there weren't 40,000 teal on the Bay by August, the hunting would be no good. There are local residents who still remember flocks of ducks 50 years ago that took 20 minutes to fly overhead. The most

common duck species using the Bay are mallard, black duck, blue-wing teal and green wing teal. Other ducks found here include wood duck, ring-necked duck, scaup, pintail and canvasback. Canada goose populations used to nearly match those of ducks. Several factors have been responsible for the decline of waterfowl, including over-hunting, lead shot, loss of wetland habitat, slight shifts of the flyway, and in the case of geese, a geographic population shift to the south, often associated with golf courses.

Besides ducks, the Bay is host to such water-associated bird species as the American coot, sora rail, Northern harrier hawk, great blue heron, and osprey. Merrymeeting Bay is the second most populous area in Maine, after

Cobscook Bay, for the recovering bald eagle population.

In 2001, the American Bird Conservancy (ABC) designated Merrymeeting Bay as one of its “Globally Important Bird Areas” in recognition of the Bay’s value to conservation of birds and their habitats. The Bay is part of an international network of key sites designated as such in an effort to further global bird conservation. Directing protection and management efforts towards these sites is crucial if viable populations of many species are to survive.

#### **PLANTS ON THE BAY**

The unique freshwater coastal wetlands of the Bay also provide a home



## UNIQUE INHABITANTS OF MERRYMEETING BAY



to about a dozen rare and sometimes threatened plant species. Most of these are small and grow in the mud. They can be prone to damage if disturbed by too much boat or foot traffic. In 1916, two eminent botanists, Fernald and Bayard Long, visited the Bay, finding and describing for the first time a new species on the Cathance they named Long's bittercress. The Bay is a prime example of a diverse estuarine plant assemblage that farther south has been so drastically altered by human impact they hardly exist at all.

### FISH SPECIES

Anadromous fish are migratory species spending most of their lives at sea while utilizing fresh water for spawning and nursery habitat. Anadromous species using the Bay are alewives, Atlantic salmon, blueback herring, rainbow smelt, American shad, Atlantic sturgeon, shortnose sturgeon, tomcod, striped bass, sea-run brook trout and

sea lamprey. Catadromous species have the opposite lifestyle, needing salt water for spawning but spending most of their lives in fresh water. The American eel is our only catadromous species, sometimes spending more than 50 years in our rivers before an attempted spawning run to the Sargasso Sea. Collectively, these two types of migratory fish are referred to as diadromous. Merrymeeting Bay is the only body of water in Maine used by all twelve of the Gulf of Maine diadromous species.

Historically, the Bay had nearly unimaginably prolific diadromous fish populations. Atlantic salmon, running



up both Kennebec and Androscoggin rivers, numbered over 100,000 fish while river herring were in the millions. Active commercial fisheries have existed in the Bay for alewives and bluebacks (both river herring), shad, striped bass, eel, smelt, salmon and sturgeon.

## UNIQUE INHABITANTS OF MERRYMEETING BAY

With massive numbers of migratory fish moving in and out of our rivers, a tremendous amount of nutrients are transferred from the Gulf of Maine far inland. (Salmon ran up to Rumford on the Androscoggin and well above Caratunk on the Kennebec. Eels went even further, to the sources of both major tributaries.) Upon out-migration, interior nutrients move back to the sea. It's important to consider our rivers like our own circulation systems. According to the Maine Natural Areas Program, 60% of all of our species live in or close

to our rivers (the riparian corridor). It is important to keep these 'arteries', or rivers and streams, free from blockage to ensure migrants move back and forth without hindrance. With conservation life flows along these shores as it should especially to provide for the Gulf of Maine, dependent for food out-migrating from freshwater, with forage species such as alewives, shad and bluebacks, etc. Awareness is the key to maintaining the healthy waters of Merrymeeting Bay.





# HUNTING

## *on Merrymeeting Bay*

Your quarry is the Sora, a small, short-billed rail that flies about as well as a newly fledged robin. And you can sometimes find, flush, and shoot at snipe just as easy.

But waterfowl—primarily mallards, teal and black duck, with some wood duck, pintail, and geese mixed in, have given the Bay its fame. This seems to have been true from the beginning: the Abenaki name for it was Quabacook—duckwatering place. Until market hunting was outlawed more than a century ago, many of the people who fished and farmed around the bay regarded ducks as simply another crop, a source of food and income. Market hunting was mostly done at night, when tens of thousands of ducks rafted up in the middle of the Bay, and could be approached under the cover of darkness, or lured into range by lantern light.

*When the moon is new or full, and the tides are exceptionally high, you can hunt rails on the Bay by pushing a boat or canoe through the marsh, flushing and shooting them.*

The rewards of any kind of hunting involve its challenges as well as its opportunities, and the Bay is rewarding on both counts.

Permanent blinds are not permitted; you simply launch your boat and head out. There is no shortage of places where ducks might be — hundreds



of acres of promising marsh, locally called grass. From the standpoint of ducks and hunters, wild rice (which is in fact a grass) is the main attraction, and in most years there is a lot of it.

But the first challenge is in finding where the ducks actually are, as opposed to where they might be. Then there are the tides which average between five and six feet and, radically affect when and where the ducks feed, and how they may best be hunted. Local knowledge, the fresher the better, helps a great deal. You may get it for the asking; the more freely it is given, the less useful it is likely to be.

Or you can acquire local knowledge the old-fashioned way; going out and looking around, hunting as you scout

and scouting as you hunt, learning to pay attention to the lunar cycle and the tidal cycle and which way the wind is blowing.

Being in the right place at the right time will at first be largely a matter of dumb luck. You should never expect or hope to eliminate such luck entirely, it gives to hunting much of the uncertainty, surprise and suspense that make it worth doing. But, by paying attention, going out as often as you can and remembering what you see and when you see it, you can begin at least to promote your luck, and so to in essence earn it.



I am not going to tell you more, except to say that, when the cold, blustery weather of the second season arrives, you want to be careful. The opposition of wind and tide can produce a nasty chop, and get you thoroughly wet and seriously chilled. Especially at the southern end of the bay, the channels through the mud flats are serpentine and hard to follow.

It isn't the easiest place to get to know. The best places never are.



# FISHING

## *on Merrymeeting Bay*

For several hundreds of years after the first Europeans arrived, Merrymeeting Bay supported a significant commercial fishery for sturgeon, salmon, shad, striped bass, alewives and eel. Today fishing here has become more of a leisure pastime.

Stripers come into the Bay in summer in numbers that vary greatly from one year to another. At present shad are still found here, but in fewer numbers, so therefore a rare catch. Salmon and sturgeon are now protected by law; however, white and yellow perch, although smaller in size, are very common and can be caught easily here in the Bay.

Two non-native species are amazingly abundant. European carp (*cyprinus carpio*) were introduced late in the 19th century, and are thriving. They grow to a very respectable size – 20 pounds or better, and can be caught on light tackle. In Europe and Asia carp is esteemed as an excellent table dish. Quite recently, white catfish (*ictalurus catus*) have shown up

*The casual and recreational fisherman can find hours of pleasure, several choices of catch and possibly a meal here during the summer on Merrymeeting Bay.*

everywhere in the Bay. They are known to feed on almost anything that is organic and can weigh as much as five pounds or more. The casual and recreational fisherman can find hours of pleasure, several choices of catch and possibly a meal here during the summer on Merrymeeting Bay.

In late fall, smelt enter the Bay, and remain until well into the spring. Once the ice is solid-usually about the first week of January, villages of smelt shacks appear. This rent by the tide and each one has a stove, electric lights, a few folding metal chairs, and the rudimentary hook, line, and sinker rigs that you will need. If you go with friends, it can be a pleasant, low-key way of socializing. Children like it; a smelt shack is a sort of play-house, and if

you happen to catch a fish or two, that adds to the fun. Sometimes whole bus loads of smelt fishermen come up from Boston to get in on the action.

Smelting is a way of getting in touch with your inner hunter-gatherer, without overtaxing your inner couch potato.





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BOWDOINHAM

# Recreation



BOWDOINHAM'S RECREATION DEPARTMENT OFFERS THE CHILDREN OF THE TOWN A HOST OF ATHLETIC, CREATIVE AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES.

Bowdoinham's recreation department offers the town's school age kids through 6th grade a host of athletic, creative and educational activities. During the summer at Maily Waterfront Park, Art at the Gazebo offers free classes twice a week in the post and beam gazebo overlooking the Cathance River. Sea Spray Kayaking Camp comes to Bowdoinham for a week every summer and introduces local children to the wonders of paddling, and towards the end of the season the Meet and Greet for incoming kindergartners takes place.

During the winter, the Bowdoinham Community School's gymnasium comes alive with the basketball program for children grades K through 6. For 3rd – 6th graders there is youth basketball through the Ararat Youth Basketball League and for the younger ones Kindergarten, 1st Grade and 2nd Grade Basketball. Also, each week children have the opportunity to visit Lost Valley Ski Area in nearby Auburn

for the Ski & Board Program. Then in the springtime there are baseball and softball programs for children in grades K through 6: T-ball, softball through the Ararat Babe Ruth League, and baseball through the Ararat Cal Ripken League. During the past two years, Bowdoinham has had the honor of hosting the 12U Cal Ripken Tournament, bringing in teams from across the region.

Programs by the recreation department are not for the younger residents only. Seniors have the opportunity to get together every Thursday as part of the Village Senior Group, to share lunch, play Bingo or engage in other special programming. In addition to all of the above activities, the recreational department organizes a Walking and Running Club, the Mad Science Program and the Richard Ferrier Scholarship.

In Bowdoinham, “It takes a community to run the recreation programs!” Sponsorship from local businesses and the volunteers that help throughout the year all help make these programs a success.

Volunteer opportunities are many, from coaching, to working the fields, running the snack shack, and making the new dugouts. It is the residents within this community that make it successful.

For more information about recreational activities and volunteer opportunities in Bowdoinham visit [www.bowdoinham.com/recreation](http://www.bowdoinham.com/recreation) or contact Recreation Director, Brooke Cox at 666-3504.



BOWDOINHAM

# Boating



## THE CATHANCE RIVER IN BOWDOINHAM IS THE GATEWAY TO MERRYMEETING BAY AND OPEN WATERS.

Merrymeeting Bay is a large freshwater tidal bay whose unusual geography defies common landform terms. It is not what is usually meant by the word “bay.” It is somewhat like an estuary except for being fresh water with very little salt. In addition to the Cathance, where you can launch your power boat, sailboat, canoe or kayak. The tides in the rivers and bay average about five feet.

If you yearn for the open ocean, Merrymeeting Bay is linked to the Gulf of Maine and the Atlantic by the Lower Kennebec River. The Bay is about 17 miles from the mouth of the Kennebec. Starting at the launch in Bowdoinham you can cross Merrymeeting Bay using the seasonal red and green navigational aids marking the channel from the Cathance to the Kennebec. From there, take a right through the Chops, a left after passing under the Sagadahoc Bridge in Bath, and you can access the Sasanoa and Sheepscot Rivers and the towns of Wiscasset and Boothbay Harbor without once venturing into the open ocean.

Whether on a day cruise or overnight on the anchor, the Bowdoinham experience

is memorable. The shore of Brick Island in the middle of Merrymeeting bay makes for a tranquil spot to drop anchor for an onboard lunch, a favorite read, or a relaxing time of fishing. At the mouth of the Abagadasset River is the ever-popular Sands: a large sandy shoreline exposed at low tide offering a great spot to beach your boat and have a picnic.

Paddling on the area's rivers and the bay is spectacular. Imagine a place where wildlife is all around you: Cormorants, bald eagles, leaping sturgeon, beavers, and turtles over a foot in diameter, to name a few. Large numbers of migrating birds use Merrymeeting Bay as a stopping point. For the east coast of the United States, the concentration of waterfowl at Merrymeeting Bay is second only to Chesapeake Bay. The unusual combination of a large body of freshwater and strong tides results

in an intertidal habitat harboring a variety of rare plant species seen in few other places in the world.

Boating in the Bowdoinham area offers all you could imagine without ever feeling overwhelmed by a crowd. Whether you are a novice or a skilled paddler, you can enjoy peaceful flat water paddling on the Cathance above the bridge toward the head of tide in Topsham, a seven mile meandering tour through pure, unspoiled wooded shores. Please note that the bridge clearance is 3-4' at high tide.

At the boat launch there is a town dock available for temporary tie ups and a restaurant and community store within walking distance. The town mooring field accommodates 20 to 25 boats; moorings are available for both residents and non-residents. For more information on boating in Bowdoinham contact the Harbor Master at 207-666-5531.



BOWDOINHAM

# Walk, Bike or Paddle



BOWDOINHAM HAS MANY NATURAL ASSETS THAT ARE BEST ENJOYED BY FOOT, BIKE OR BY WATER.

The many country roads, trails, wildlife areas and waterways make a very enjoyable setting for your self-propelled adventures.

Bowdoinham is a terrific starting point for any length bike tour. There are several short rides that utilize back roads and offer views of both the hills and rivers. These roads generally have very light traffic. A longer and very popular trek takes a rider all the way around Merrymeeting Bay and is the venue for the once-a-year Merrymeeting Bay bike tour. The Town Landing Restaurant in the village center can provide refreshments and supplies for your ride. Beautiful Maily Waterfront Park has a picnic area for an extended stop and a great view of the waterfront.

Bowdoinham's geographic location makes it an ideal destination for paddling, for all skill levels. You can choose from maintained access points: Maily Waterfront Park or Abbadagassett Bridge on Carding Machine Road, which will provide you access to the Cathance River, West Branch, Abagadasset River, Kennebec River and Merrymeeting Bay. Much of the land along the water is undeveloped and is home to

diverse wildlife. For more information on paddling, go to [www.bowdoinham.com/Paddle-Brochure](http://www.bowdoinham.com/Paddle-Brochure).

Bowdoinham has much to offer those that are interested in walking and hiking. The Wildlife Management Area just off Wildes Road provides for wonderful views of Merrymeeting Bay. There is a trail behind the Community School that is a great place to take your kids to explore after playing on the playground. The Cathance River Trail is a short walk on Town-owned property that ends with a lookout view of the Cathance River and the town. While these areas are typically explored in the summertime, winter provides for a unique opportunity to snowshoe or cross-country ski. In 2009, Bowdoinham was the

recipient of a Maine Department of Transportation Quality Community Program Grant to install new sidewalks in the village area. Work has begun on these improvements that will make Bowdoinham a true walkable village. In addition, the town is working with neighboring towns on the Merrymeeting trail project with the goal of creating a multi-use trail from the existing bike path in Topsham through Bowdoinham and Richmond to the popular trail in Gardiner.

Bowdoinham's Biking, Walking, Paddle Group has produced a pamphlet that highlights all of Bowdoinham's paddling opportunities. Come and join us! For more information, go to [www.bowdoinham.com/walking-biking-paddling](http://www.bowdoinham.com/walking-biking-paddling).



BOWDOINHAM

# Snowmobiling



## BOWDOINHAM BOASTS A VAST AND WELL MAINTAINED TRAIL SYSTEM FOR A SMALL TOWN IN MID-COAST MAINE.

Organized in the 1970's, the Bowdoinham Snowbirds is the local snowmobile club, a volunteer group responsible for maintaining over 50 miles of trails. The Snowbirds meet regularly from September thru April, work hard at clearing brush from trails every Sunday in the fall, and groom trails frequently once the snow falls. The trail network connects residents living in downtown Bowdoinham through the northern part of town and beyond.

Bowdoinham's snowmobile trails bring travelers through a variety of landscapes, and showcase the many features that make Bowdoinham a special place. Riding from one part of town to another, snowmobilers experience the dichotomy of two worlds within a short period of time. One portion of trail affectionately known as "The Tunnels" overlooks a large field alongside automobile traffic humming along the Interstate. This area is a crossroads for several trails, and decisions on where

to travel next are commonly made at this location. Thanks to the generosity of landowners allowing access through their properties, snowmobilers are able to enjoy riding among snow covered trees in peaceful mixed woodlots, traversing wide open expanses of farm fields, accessing many services downtown, and, upon exploring the farthest reaches of the trail system, may find tranquility at Merrymeeting Bay or decide to visit the neighboring towns of Richmond, Litchfield, or Bowdoin. Snowshoers, cross country skiers, and the occasional dog sled also enjoy the winter opportunities made possible by the trail system.

For trail maps and more information about the Bowdoinham Snowbirds, visit the website at [www.mesnowbirds.com](http://www.mesnowbirds.com).

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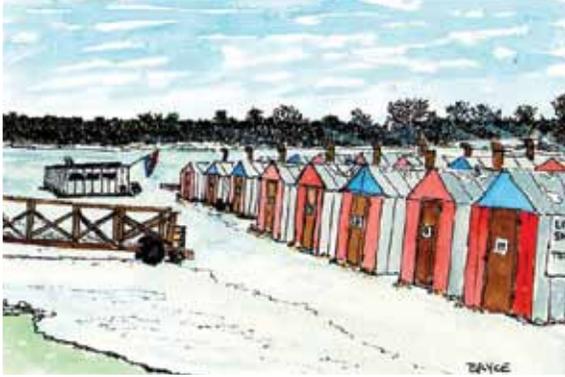
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The fish shacks, shanties, cabins, huts or camps, as they are referenced, can operate around-the-clock on busy weekends and when the fishing is in prime form. The booking times are around the six-hour tides, both incoming and outgoing, and it is not uncommon for the best fishing to be in the wee hours of the morning.

Smelt fishing in Bowdoinham is now also a multi-generational business with, in some cases, the third generation participation in making the fishing experience successful for the family and the customers. The three commercial smelt camps in town have become so famous that it is no longer unusual to have new articles appear in the Boston Globe or New York Times. And while there is a long-standing tradition of local fishing parties, the businesses claim that 70 to 80% of their business is from out of state.

The smelting operation is usually a January to early March business, but the camps are outfitted with a small wood stove that over a season can burn as much as a cord of wood. And regardless of how cold it is outside, it does not take long to get toasty inside. Smelt fishing is an authentic Bowdoinham experience for all.

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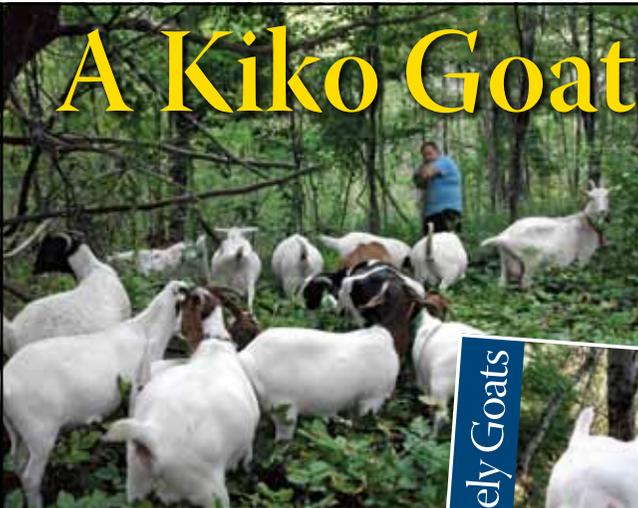
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# merrymeeting ARTS CENTER

check our website for our  
current schedule of events



## Art For Everyone

**MISSION:** Merrymeeting Arts Center encourages art, education, and community, celebrating the cultural heritage and natural environment of Merrymeeting Bay.

**GALLERY: (9 Main Street)**

The center gallery exhibits work by emerging and established local artists, and hosts art openings on a regular basis.

**BRYCE Muir™ : (9 Main Street)**

The center houses a rotating exhibit of Bryce Muir's work including the Local Myth Series featuring Bowdoinham wildlife.

**EDUCATION: (6 Main Street)**

The center offers learning opportunities for children and adults through art, craft and theater workshops and classes.

**PERFORMING ARTS & FILM:**

The center partners with individuals and groups to bring live performances and films to Bowdoinham. Performances are held at the Bowdoinham Town Hall as well as in the 9 Main Street building.

9 Main Street • Bowdoinham, ME 04008

207-710-0349

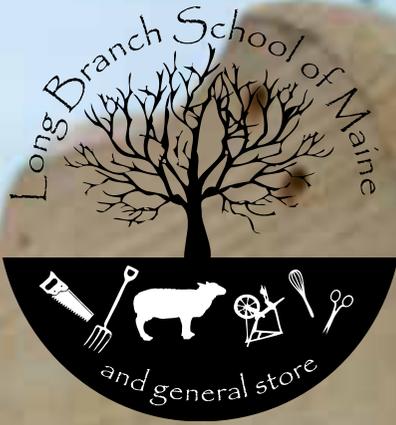
[merrymeetingartscenter@gmail.com](mailto:merrymeetingartscenter@gmail.com)

[www.merrymeetingartscenter.org](http://www.merrymeetingartscenter.org)

MERRYMEEING ARTS  
CENTER wishes to thank  
FHC for its continuing  
support of the center  
and of the arts and  
artists in Bowdoinham.

# FHC

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