

# 1. HISTORIC AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

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## Historic Overview

Earle Shettleworth, Director of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, cites Wiscasset as one of three architecturally significant villages in the state, along with the towns of Paris Hill and Castine. Samuel Chamberlain, in his book *Towns of New England*, chose Wiscasset to represent the State of Maine. He noted that millions were spent restoring Williamsburg, while Wiscasset remains essentially intact.

Today, its abundance of classical architecture is evidenced by the inclusion of 10 structures in the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of 1936 and the subsequent inclusion of five buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Buildings. In 1973, a large part of the Village/Historic District became a part of the National Register. In fact, much of the downtown area is a living field museum – and we hold the keys to its future.

The first recorded settlement at Wiscasset was in 1660 by George and John Davie. By 1740, there were 30 families at Wiscasset Point, numbering about 150 people. Wiscasset Point was one of three parishes incorporated in Pownalborough in 1760. It took the name of Wiscasset in 1802.

As Wiscasset prospered as a deep-harbor shipping port during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, grander homes were built beyond the initial simple, smaller homes closer to the harbor. These include the Nickels-Sortwell House, the Wood-Foote House and the Governor Smith House. Other structures of note are the elegant brick courthouse, which is home to the longest continuously operating courthouse in the country; the Old Jail, in operation until the 1950s; the Wiscasset Library; the Town Common; the Sunken Garden; the Ancient Cemetery, and much more.

By the end of the Revolution to the Embargo of 1807, Wiscasset had no equal in any part of Maine as the chief shipping port east of Boston. It was a very prosperous era with so many ships registered here, that it was said you could walk from deck to deck all the way across the harbor and masts were everywhere the eye could see.

The Embargo, intended to prevent war with England, failed and Wiscasset fortunes declined from that time, as shipping dried up and creditors loomed. Now we find ourselves, generations later, again seeking new fortunes and new avenues for our community to prosper. And, as surveys have shown a number of times, the majority of townspeople consider Wiscasset's venerable history as unique and something to be proud of – and something to preserve for those that will follow after us.

This same majority understand that our historic landscape and heritage is as valuable an asset as are our schools; our still protected, deep-harbor working waterfront; our developing airport; the advent of air/rail/ferry travel with a stop in Wiscasset; and the development potential at both the Mason Station and the Maine Yankee site.

In conclusion, it would be shortsighted at best to discount the economic value of a preserved, nurtured “field museum” here in our care. Thousands of tourists stop in Wiscasset each year, through at least

three seasons of the year. They used to come to see the Old Ships – we failed to preserve those. Now we have a chance to step up to the plate again - this time to preserve a greater prize – our overall historic heritage, proud and unique.

We are past due to put safeguards in place to save our history from disappearing. Just like the Old Ships, it will not be reclaimable once lost. We need to install these safeguards and seek ways to best showcase our historic heritage so that it takes its rightful place as one of Wiscasset’s most valued cultural and economic assets.

## **Prehistoric Archaeology**

The Maine Historic Preservation Commission has identified several archaeological site-sensitive areas and known prehistoric archaeological sites. The maps of these sites are on file in the Town Office.

There are two types of marks on these maps - squiggles and cross hatches. The squiggles represent archaeologically-sensitive sites. They are meant to be about 50 meters wide along the shoreline. The squiggles and areas associated with Montsweag Brook and Gardiner Pond are marked because of “very high probability that there are sites within these areas, although no archaeological survey work has been done.” The crosshatched areas (marshland next to Montsweag Brook and Gardiner Pond) may contain archaeological sites but are less probable than the squiggly locations, according to Dr Arthur Spiess, Senior Archaeologist, in a letter dated February 24, 2004.

The other marked shoreline areas (squiggles) contain known archaeological sites. They are mostly Native American campsites of the Ceramic period and/or Contact period (3000 years ago until about 1700 A.D.).

Sites 26.10 and 26.11 are located adjacent to the railroad line north of Town. One of these is a large shell midden or shell heap. Sites 16.212 and 16.213 are small shell midden remnants along the shore near Maine Yankee and on Little Oak Island.

Sites 16.122 and 16.123 are small shell middens at the tip of Chewonki Neck. Site 16.246 is near Cushman Cove and is a small shell midden of prehistoric (undetermined) age.

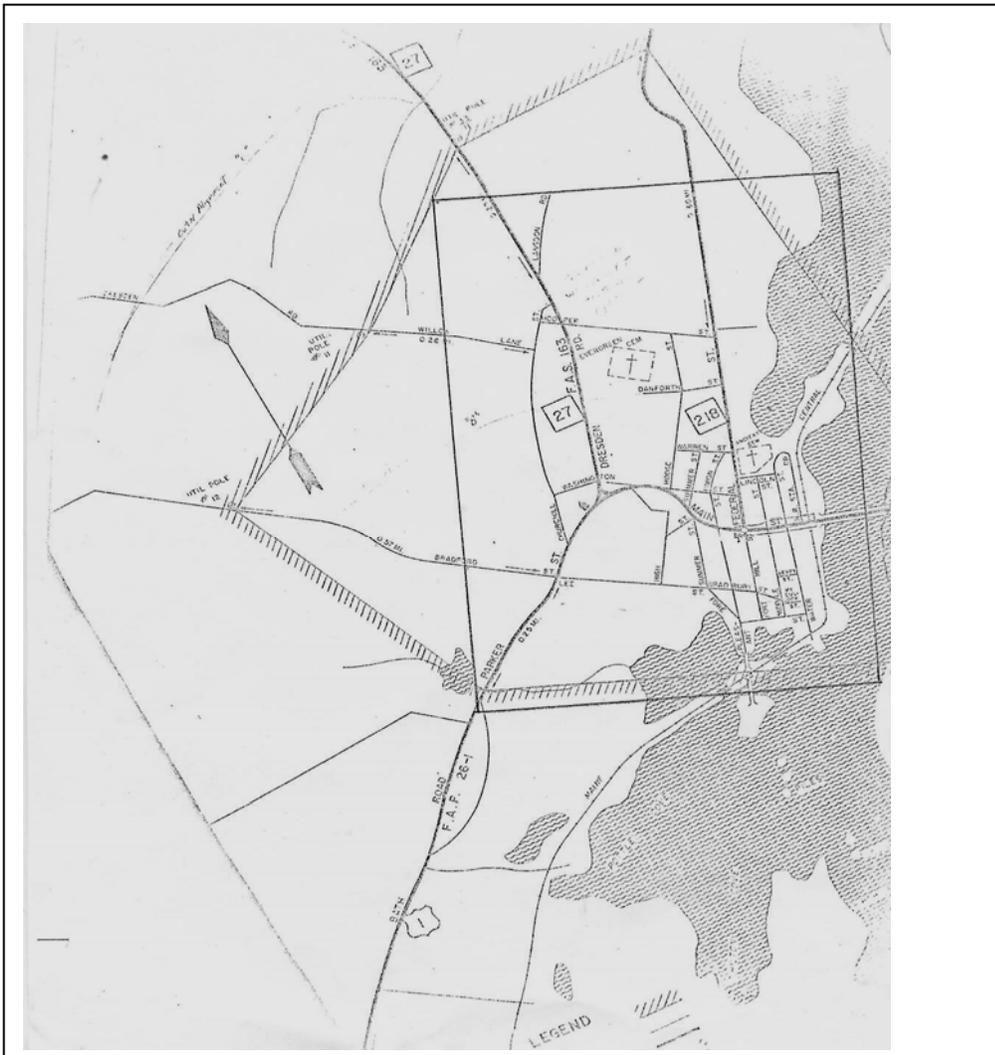
Maps of these sites are available at Town Hall.

## **Designation of the Historic District**

The Historic District was designated in 1973 and is now referred to as the Historic Overlay District. William Murtoogh, Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places at the Department of Interior, and Earl Shettleworth, longtime Director of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, asked Wiscasset residents Wolcott Andrews and Marguerite Rafter to submit the application. Andrews and Rafter were then President and Director of the Lincoln County Historical Society, respectively. The application was submitted to the Maine Historic Preservation Commission and the National Park Service in the Department of Interior.

Necessitated by the computer mapping technology available at the time a rectangle was drawn on a map and at the suggestion of Earl Shettleworth, included historic Federal Street houses just beyond the

Old Jail. The southwest corner is at the intersection of Flood Avenue and Route 1, across from Holbrook Pond. The northwest corner is in the Sortwell Forest and includes some of Bradford Road and Willow Lane. The northeast corner is in the Sheepscoot River. The southeast corner is also in the Sheepscoot south of the Village.



The application includes a listing of the historic homes (see below). Excerpts of the Statement of Significance help us appreciate the historic resources that qualify Wiscasset for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places:

*“...Wiscasset is an authentic late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century sea and river port. Its growth is visible in its buildings which remain, as a whole, intact and are a type of field museum that should be preserved...Included in the proposed district are several distinct types of houses. The early, small houses some incorporating earlier hovels, were built about 1760-80 reflecting less prosperous surroundings. . . .*

*“With the affluence occurring around 1800, grander homes were built. Today one sees those about the “rim” as a series of fires “gutted” the center of town. The most noteworthy of these*

#### Historical and Archaeological Resources

*are the Nickels-Sortwell House, The Wood-Foote House and that of Governor Smith. Equally important to the town are the lesser homes or farmhouses that stretch out Federal Street, a true road of 19<sup>th</sup> century living, little changed by newer buildings.*

[Another criterion for listing on the National Register of Historic Places is that notable people occupied these houses]... *Judges Bailey, Orchard Cook, Honorable JD McCrate and Abiel Wood, of this town, have been representatives in Congress and Hon. Samuel E. Smith, another citizen, was for three years Governor of Maine.*"

## **Private Properties Listed in the National Register of Historic Places**

The following properties are listed in the National Register of Historic Places or are in the Historic Overlay District and are eligible to be listed individually. These chosen for the Plan are the keystones to represent the others in the District.

### **1. Foye-Sortwell Farm – Gardiner Road and Willow Lane**

Owned by Daniel Sortwell, a descendent of a family that was among the earliest settlers.

### **2. Judge Thomas Rice House - Route 1**

Until a few years ago, this home was owned by Wolcott Andrews, a descendent of Judge Rice. The house incorporates the original "hovel," built before 1766 on the site and is considered one of the oldest homes in town. It is an example of a "Cape Cod," pre-revolutionary structure. It has recently been restored to its original rooms downstairs.

### **2a. Kingsbury House - Federal & Washington Streets**

The house was built by Colonel John Kingsbury in 1763 on the site of the Nickels-Sortwell Mansion. Nickels moved the house to its present site when he had his mansion built. It is the oldest two-story house recorded on "Wiscasset Point." The simple early woodwork has also been restored.

### **3. Tucker-Nash House - Main and Pleasant Street.**

Built by David Silvester before 1784 and moved in 1792 from Water Street to its present site by Capt Richard Tucker. At the time it was a hovel among mansions. For many years, it was the home of Henry Nash, acting Minister of St. Philips Church.

### **4. Erskine-Marston House - Main and Middle Streets**

This house was built by Capt. Alexander Erksine in 1785 and was once the home of Col. Erastus Foote, Maine's first Attorney General. Now it functions as both an antique shop and home.

### **5. Hodge House - Route 1 and Hodge Street**

Built by Henry Hodge in 1787, this house has interesting bay windows. It also has the distinction of being listed in the Historic American Building Survey, HABS, #1949. This survey project was one of the Depression-era WPA projects. Each house identified was assigned a number. It was restored by Les Fossel in the 1990's. There is now an antique store in the barn.

**6. Lilac Cottage - Washington and Main Streets**

Built before 1789. The cellar is of primitive construction. The house was a tea-room for many years and is currently an antique shop.

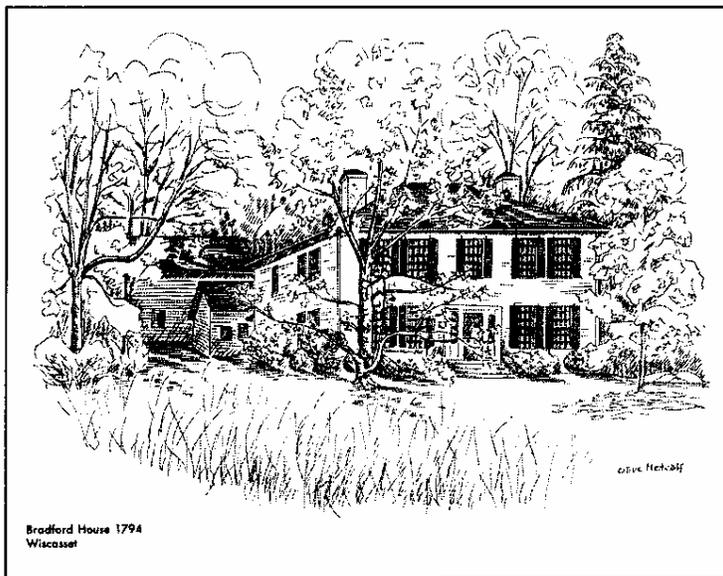
**7. Gov. Smith House (Lee House) - High Street**

Built by Silas Lee in 1792. Considered one of the best architectural houses in Maine. An attached long wing burned in the 1950's. It is known, too, for having its own "ghosts." Fanny Chase in her book, "Wiscasset in Pownalborough," says "the Lee House, monumental in proportion and precision of outline, with its captain's walk, its semi-circular portico whose exquisite entablature is supported by Ionic columns, its staircase both unique and beautiful, its mullioned windows and superb interior finish, place it in the foremost rank as one of the finest examples of colonial architecture in Maine." Artists and architects come yearly to sketch or measure this masterpiece.

**8. The Elms - Pleasant and Bradbury Streets**

Built by General Abiel Wood in 1793. General Wood's last wife, Sally Sayward Wood, was the first Maine female novelist. William Elmes moved the house to its present site from the foot of the Common in 1847.

**9. Bradford House - Bradford Road**



Built in 1794 by Alden Bradford, a descendent of Governor Bradford. Alden was the second Congregational minister of Wiscasset and later became Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. He wrote "History of Massachusetts" and "A Gentleman's House."

**10. Frances Cook House – Pleasant and Main Streets**

Built in 1795 by Frances Cook, who was the first Collector of Customs and a personal friend of George Washington. The structure was three-storied with a mansard roof and 17 fireplaces. The roof was lowered and only 14 fireplaces remain.

**11. Manasseh Smith House - Main and Pleasant Streets**

Built by Manasseh Smith in 1797 and thought to be the first brick house in town. It is now used as an office building.

**12. Moses Carleton House - High Street**

Built by Joseph Tinkham Wood in 1804-05. The architect is said to have been Nicholas Codd, who designed the Cavanaugh House in Newcastle, the Spite House in Rockport and possibly the Nickels - Sortwell house in Wiscasset. Captain Moses Carleton bought the house for a hundred puncheons of rum. Carleton lived there until he died in his 90's. He was a poor man but known for his taking in needy children to live with his own family. The house was restored to its original design by Logan Luke, former resident of Wiscasset.

**13. Pink House (no longer pink), or Damon House - Federal and Washington Streets**

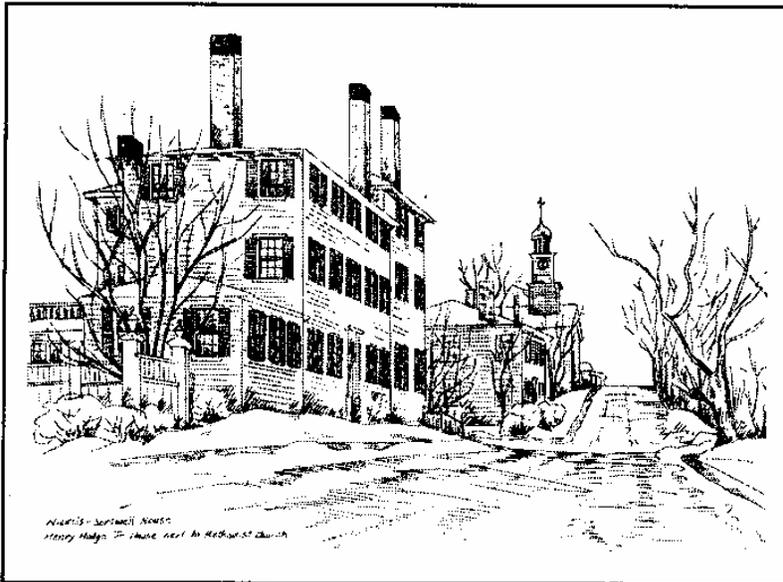
Built by William Stacey in 1805, this is one of five federal houses built by him and still standing. Joshua Damon was a craftsman of note at the time and some of his furniture is now in museums. His descendents left the house to Harvard University to be used as a house for artists in all fields. That will was later broken.

**14. Pumpkin House - Fore and Fort Hill Streets**

Built by Hartley Wood in 1807. This, and the house of his brother, Abiel Wood, contained the only marble-faced fireplaces in town. As one of Frances Sortwell's "saved" houses, it was the summer home of Sidney Howard, author and playwright, from 1925-30. Its name is derived from the color of the house.

**15. Nickels-Sortwell House - Main and Federal Street**

Owned by Historic New England, formerly SPNEA (Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities). This well-known local tourist attraction was built by William Nickels in 1807 (HABS., ME-102). It was a boarding house for many years until Alvin Sortwell, a descendent of the Foyes, and former mayor of Cambridge, Massachusetts, bought it as a summer home. His widow and daughter lived there year round and turned the empty cellar hole across the street into today's "Sunken Garden." That spot was left to the town, provided it remain a garden. Frances Sortwell gave the house to SPNEA. It is open to the public each summer.



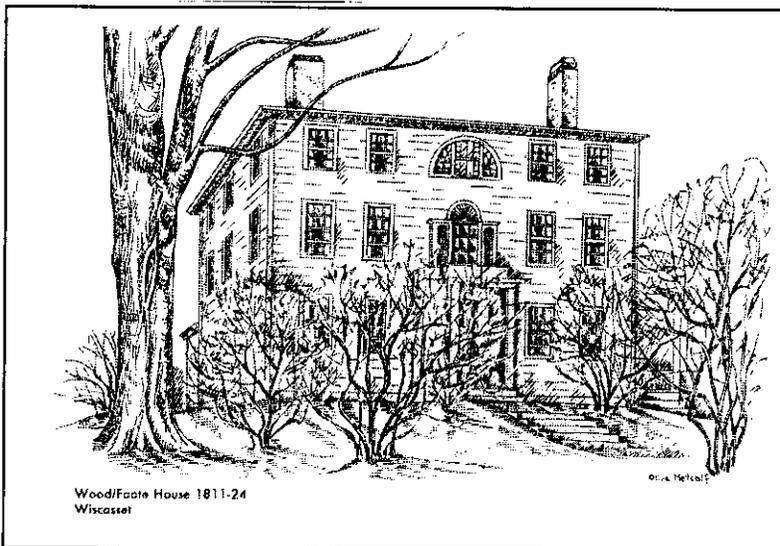
Nickels-Sortwell House

**16. Castle Tucker - High and Lee Street**

Owned by Historic New England. Built by Silas Lee in 1807, the house had a number of owners until Captain Richard Tucker bought it in 1858. He added the portico, extended the house, and furnished it with Victorian furniture, much of which is still in the house. Captain Tucker's heir, Jane Tucker, lived in the house for many years before donating the house to SPNEA.

It is an authentic Victorian house, containing no reproductions. The elliptical flying staircase is outstanding, and the double piazza is a landmark. It is open to the public in the summer.

**17. Wood-Foote House - High and Lee Streets**



Built by Major Abiel Wood between 1811 and 1825. Building was stopped early on by the death of Wood's wife and the War of 1812, but was finally finished in 1825. It has double-brick insulation. Until recently, it was owned by Major Wood's descendents. It is a three-story mansion with a graceful Palladian doorway and window.

**18. Blagdon-Emerson House** - Federal Street near Danforth

Built before 1819. It is a typical two-story “manse and mart,” or home and shop, where Charles Emerson published *Lilliputian* (1881-91) and then the *Sheepscot Echo* (both newspapers of the era). This type of house was placed at right angles to the street level to accommodate the “mart.” There are several examples of this arrangement still in town.

**19. Samuel Page House** - Lee Street

Built in 1837. By the 1920s, it had become a “slum” and was rescued and repaired by Frances Sortwell who added the hand carved porch by Edbury Hatch of Damariscotta (HABS ME-91).

**20. Clark-Wood House (Musical Wonder House)** - High Street

Built as a double house in 1852 by Henry Clark and Captain George H. Wood. Fannie Chase made it into a single dwelling in the 1920s. Her son Charles G. “Chippie” Chase carved birds from single logs, many of which are now museum pieces. The house is currently a music box museum, and it is open to the paying public during the summer.

**21. Octagon House** - 63 Federal Street

Built by Captain George Scott in 1855, it is a two-story brick, octagonal house, a unique architectural design (HABS ME-85) and was listed in the National Register in 1972. Once used as a school administration building, Hildreth Hawes later restored it as a residence.

## **Public Properties Listed in the National Register of Historic Places**

**P1. Ancient Cemetery** - Federal and Lincoln Streets

Owned by the Town of Wiscasset. The oldest stone dates from 1739.

**P2. Wiscasset Public Library** - High and Main Streets

Built in 1803. The second brick structure in Wiscasset. Originally it was built to house the Lincoln & Kennebec Bank, and later the Wiscasset Bank and Mariner’s Bank. The county offices were located there until the Lincoln County Courthouse was built in 1824. The bank vault was sited, underwater, in a deep well for protection.

Originally a two- story building with a mansard roof, it was an example of how commercial buildings were then built as houses. Later, it was used as a residence for many years.

In 1903, Andrew Carnegie came to this country as a passenger on the *Wiscasset*, a ship owned by Captain Johnston. He offered \$4,000 to the town to erect a new library, but the Town couldn’t afford the money for its upkeep so the offer was not accepted. Frances Sortwell along with others founded the present library.

**P3. Old Academy - Hodge and Warren Streets**

Now owned by the Town of Wiscasset and leased by the Maine Art Gallery. The gallery was founded by Mildred Burrage and was one of the earliest galleries to show the work of Maine artists.

Built in 1807 for the Wiscasset Academical Association, the building was used as a school until 1923 (HABS ME-48). It was listed in the National Register on October 6, 1970. The Maine Art Gallery is open to the public except in winter.

**P4. Lincoln County Museum and Old Jail - Upper Federal Street**

Owned by Lincoln County Historical Association. The jail was built in 1809-11 and was considered, at the time, to be humanitarian as it had separate cells and windows (slits). There was no heat until late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was the third jail in town and the first building in Maine to be built for the safekeeping of criminals. Until the state prison in Thomaston was established, the Old Jail was used for the confinement of many notorious felons.

The granite slabs used in its construction were from Edgecomb quarries and are 41 inches thick at the foundation and 30 inches at the eaves.

These great stones also form the ceilings of the cells. There are six cells on each of the two floors. The third story had quarters for debtors who were allowed out during the day to earn money, but had to return at night. There was a large room used for a work area.

In the 1920s, it provided holding cells for prisoners appearing in the nearby courthouse. In 1954, it was turned over to the Lincoln County Historic Association, provided the group maintained it as a museum and opened it to the public in the summer.

The Jailer's House burned and was rebuilt in 1837. The jailer's wife provided food for the prisoners and their diet depended upon her generosity and thriftiness. The kitchen has a large hearth and a beehive oven, and the barn has a wonderful collection of old tools.

**P5. Old Powder House**

Owned by the Town of Wiscasset. Built in 1813 of brick, the structure was used to store gunpowder during War of 1812 (HABS ME-70).

**P6. Old Custom House - Water, Fore & Middle Streets**

Built in 1869-70, the building was initially used as a customs house, and later housed Wiscasset's post office up until the 1960s. At that time, the present post office was built on Route 1. It was then offered to the Lincoln County Historical Association, but was refused because an estimate to replace the slate roof was more than the association could afford. It was put up for auction and purchased by Charlotte Rust Hodgeman. The upper story was turned into living quarters and the downstairs became commercial space.



resources

## Old Custom House

### **P7. Wawenock Block - Main Street**

A brick commercial building, designed in 1856 by Alexander Johnston, Jr. It represents one of three such commercial buildings in our downtown. Until then, residential house designs were used for commercial buildings. These buildings are gems of their time and are an important part of our historic Village.

### **Schools**

The following is a list of schools in Wiscasset. Only the current school buildings and the Old Academy are still in existence.

1792 - School on the site of current Episcopal Rectory

1800 - School in center of town near the Common

1805 - Town voted to build two schools

1807-1923 - Old Academy Brick Building- see above

(Note that, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, every family kept flocks of geese to supply students with quills!)

1816 - Latin Grammar School

1860-1910 - Garrison Hill School on Fort Hill, it is now the Masonic Hall

1908 - Grammar school.

(By 1941 there were six schools in Town.)

There was a high school at the site of the present middle school. Currently the primary school and high school are located on Route 27, and the middle school is located on Federal Street.

## **Fishing**

A great abundance of fish encouraged Europeans to settle in the Wiscasset area in the early 1600s. As late as 1871 there were 122 vessels engaged in cod and mackerel fishing. Fishing was not the only commodity or industry that the area's waterways offered to Wiscasset. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Wiscasset became the most important seaport north of Boston.

## **Timber Trade**

The spruce and pine trees that thickly lined the banks of local rivers and streams were initially used for building dwellings and small vessels. But lumbering quickly became one of the town's most important industries. Saw mills were built in many locations along rivers and streams, along with grist, shingle and fulling mills. Seven mills were located on Montsweag Stream alone. The largest was the Gould mill, which wove cloth and was built at the site of the largest water cascade on the stream. Some of the older mills were located in the northern part of town on Mill Creek or Polly Clark Brook.

In the summer of 1834, saw and gristmills were also built on White's Island (then Holbrook's Island). In 1857, Isaac Hobson bought the steam sawmill from Harriman and Clark and for the next 20 years ran a thriving business. Some of the mills ran day and night, and lumber was shipped on sailing vessels all year long. Three steamers were built at Hobson's mill. As the forests were cut farther and farther inland, this coastal industry was undermined. Hobson's mill shut down in 1887. In 1910, Erastus Foote bought the island and rented part of it to Fred Pendleton who ran a boat yard there. Some of the finest yachts in the state were built at his shop. Later, the island was planted with trees and was the site of a private boat landing, as well as the Wiscasset Swimming Club bathhouses.

In 1872, Ira Sturgis, of Augusta, one of the biggest lumber dealers in the state, came to town to make arrangements for the construction of a steam saw-mill at Birch Point, which later became the site of the Mason Station plant. The site provided deep-water access for ships and transport by railroad. In 1873, the Town built the Birch Point Bridge to connect the site with the village.

At the height of the shipping trade, each of the New England seaports had their own particular niche regarding commodities and recipient ports. Wiscasset had her timber trade, which later evolved into a three-way trade: south to Charleston and the Caribbean where they picked up rum, sugar and cotton destined for British ports; Portsmouth and Newburyport shipped fish to Martinique, Guadeloupe and Puerto Rico; Newport traded largely in rum and slaves; while Providence had the corner on spice and tea, to name a few.

Maritime exchange with the Spanish colonies resulted in the influx of Spanish dollars, known as pieces of eight and Spanish doubloons, and both currencies were used in the execution of deeds and contracts in Wiscasset.

But with the Embargo of 1807, shipping received a deathblow and that included Wiscasset's timber trade and the shipbuilding industry as well. The embargo ended Wiscasset's period of great prosperity and impoverished many ship owners. That very impoverishment protected the town from architectural "improvements" that cast blight on so many other towns.

## Shipbuilding

Fannie Chase in her book, *Wiscasset in Pownalborough*, said that sailors and poets believe that ships have souls – she continues that when the ships of the Sheepscot “all fresh from the sail-maker and rigger, spread their canvas and glided away through the Narrows to meet the distant water, even the most prosaic would admit that, if not endowed with a soul, they at least responded to the breath of life.” That vision provides a glimpse into our Town’s intriguing maritime history.

Vessels of varying sizes and rigs were built all along the Sheepscot as far inland as Head Tide. There were shipyards at Sheepscot Falls, Newcastle, and Edgecomb. The *Virginia*, a 30-ton ship, was the first ship made in America and was built close to the mouth of the Sheepscot River. The first record of a ship built at Wiscasset Point is from the record of Michael Sevey in 1797, which said he had come to Wiscasset to “help build a ship.”

It was not until the incorporation of Pownalborough that records of sizeable vessels built in Wiscasset appear. Abiel Wood, Wiscasset’s biggest ship-owner, came to Birch Point in 1776 and evidently opened a shipyard soon after. It is believed the yard was located on the shore of Bradbury’s Cove. Later, Morrill Hilton, Jr., had his yard there, parts of which could still be seen at low tide for many years. Another early shipyard, owned by Seth Tinkham, is thought to have been situated at the foot of Main Street (then State Street), close to the Town landing.

The Kingsbury shipyard was erected in the tidal cove. John Kingsbury’s family home was located at what is now the site of the Nickels-Sortwell house, currently a well-known tourist attraction. Around the time of the Revolution, his business and fortunes were reduced and Kingsbury moved to some “wild land” on the Gardiner Road, about a mile and a half from the village.

Interestingly, a newspaper of the time reported that Daniel Brocklebank sailed in the fifth ship he built in America from the Sheepscot River in May of 1778, reaching Whitehaven, England 32 days later. The Anchor-Brocklebank Line of England, founded by Brocklebank in 1770, was the forerunner of the Cunard Steamship Co.

## Brickyards

Birch Point took the lead in the manufacturing of brick. Local soil was composed of large amounts of clay, needed in the making of bricks. When the Lincoln County Courthouse was built in 1824, Silas Porter’s brickyard, near Birch Point, supplied one-third of the bricks for the project. There were at least seven brickyards on Brick Yard Brook, along with many other kilns along the rivers and creeks of surrounding areas.

Silas Porter ran another yard at his pottery on Birch Point that furnished bricks for many Wiscasset buildings. According to Chase, many of Wiscasset’s old village houses are lined with bricks made by Porter.

The most productive yard was owned by Captain Richard H. Tucker in 1875 and was the largest brickyard in the county. The kiln was large enough to hold one million bricks along with the wood for burning. In 1883, the Wiscasset Brick & Pottery Co. Works at Birch Point, formerly the Porters’ yard, had a daily output of 22,000 bricks. The remains of some of these brickyards can still be seen around Wiscasset.

## **Ice**

Ice – the word conjures up all sorts of images from tall, cool summer drinks that clink with the movement of ice cubes in a frosted glass, to skating parties and bonfires, to a glistening, wonderland coating on trees and shrubs in winter as sunlight kicks it all into high relief. Back in the days of early Wiscasset, ice harvesting was a profitable industry that made possible the necessary cooling to preserve food and liquids.

In the early years of 1870, the ice industry began to flourish along the Sheepscot River and elsewhere. By 1890, the business had boomed to the point that three million tons of ice were cut in Maine. At the Mason Station site, David Stinson started an ice works. Subsequently, the Kennebec Land and Lumber Company erected icehouses with a capacity of 16,000 tons. Ice was shipped to Baltimore, Norfolk and Newport News, as well as used locally.

In 1875, the Walrus Ice Company of Wiscasset was formed. The ice was generally cut from the ponds in January, at a thickness of 16-18 inches. First, snow scraper teams removed snow and debris. Next, the ice was planed smooth and marked into squares, checkerboard fashion, with a “groover.” The grooves were further scored by an ice plow. The ice was then sawed into cakes by an up-and-down ice saw, broken apart with a busting bar and stored in sawdust-lined storehouses.

The Ellsworth Holbrook’s Ice Home Delivery Service stored ice in sawdust at the ice house beside the pond, and delivered ice in the Village through the 30’s and even after WWII.

Vessels were loaded with ice squares each weighing about 400 pounds. The ice was dunnaged (packed) to prevent it from shifting or melting during southern transit. Each year, Birch Point ice works depended on a crew from Westport Island, always the same men, to supplement their own workforce. The manufacture of artificial ice eventually deprived Maine including Wiscasset of this industry.

## **Railroad**

The Knox and Lincoln Railroad line, from Woolwich to Rockland, was built in 1870-71 covering a distance of 48 miles. This stretch completed the system connecting Boston with Rockland. The line was constructed almost entirely with local money and was estimated to cost \$57,000 per mile.

The astronomical cost resulted from the switching of the siting of a ferry crossing from Richmond to Bath, necessitating the building of bridges, deep rock cutting and the construction of an expensive ferry to Bath to reroute. The project impoverished the Town of Wiscasset. According to Chase, it was jestingly said of the engineers that, “when they came to a swamp they bridged it; when they came to a ledge they blasted it; but when they came to a cow, they went around it.”

President Grant and his party passed through Wiscasset in 1873 on their way to Rockland on a special train. Even so, the Knox and Lincoln was not a success financially and Wiscasset was bankrupted. But there was a silver lining to the cloud. Due to a complex judgment recovery process in place at the time, little was gained by creditors from legal proceedings, so most real estate/buildings remained intact – in effect, preservation by default. The original Federal architecture remained essentially unchanged.

Additionally, in the spring of 1854, the Wiscasset & Quebec Railroad was authorized for construction of a line from Wiscasset to the boundary of the Canadian province of Quebec. A charter was granted and renewed, but ultimately it was decided to build a narrow gauge line to the same point. By 1892, it looked as though Wiscasset would become the winter port for the St. Lawrence River (Canada).

Rails were brought to Wiscasset by schooner. Trains began running along the line in 1894 and in 1895 the line extended as far as Albion. Through changes of ownership and charter, the railroad became known as the Wiscasset, Waterville & Farmington Railroad Company. It was hoped the railroad would merge with one of the major trunk lines, change to standard gauge, and a western, transcontinental connection would ensue, making Wiscasset the eastern end of a coast-to-coast system. This plan failed and the railroad was sold in 1906. The buyer operated the railroad for some years, until the advent of an electric line in East Vassalboro and the increasing proliferation of motorcars. The railroad's best year was 1921 - the last narrow-gauge train ran over the tracks in 1933.

## **21st Century**

Wiscasset is at a commercial crossroad. While recovering from the loss of Maine Yankee Atomic Power Plant, a single-payer tax base, the town is prepared to take new advantage of its many assets.

First and foremost, we are a community committed to succeed and prevail over adversity. We are prepared to work together and work hard. While we no longer have our timber trade, shipbuilding, brickyards, or ice industry, we still have abundant natural resources; a vibrant, working waterfront with deepwater access, serving both commercial and recreational interests; our unique historic and cultural heritage; access to major highway, railroad and airport; a good school system, along with many specific tourist attractions in Town.

Our future is waiting for us.

## **Cemeteries**

A survey, made by Jane Tucker, showing 41 cemeteries is kept in the Jane Tucker room in the town library. Cemeteries marked with an asterisk are town-owned and -managed: the Ancient Cemetery at the intersection of Lincoln and Federal Streets, Evergreen on Hodge Street, Greenlawn (Old, New and Crematory Park) on Rumrill Road, and Woodlawn on Birch Point Road.

## **Historic Archeological Sites**

The Maine Historic Preservation Commission has made available a map with 48 historical archeological sites. These are mostly European-American remains when historic written records existed. The list is keyed to the numbers on the Historic Archeological Sites, provided by Maine Historic Preservation Commission. Copies of this map are available at the Town Office.

## **Existing Historic Preservation Programs and Laws**

**National Register of Historic Places.** The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of Historical and Archaeological Resources

the nation's cultural resources worthy of preservation. Properties may include districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects that are significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture. The federal or state government or the community may nominate sites. The National Park Service, under the Secretary of the Interior, administers the National Register of Historic Places.

- **Nomination Process.** While Wiscasset is already designated in the National Register of Historic Places and many structures are in the Register, owners may want to nominate their houses, or the Town may want to expand the boundaries of the Historic Village. Then too, the information gathered to meet eligibility criteria forms the basis for all future preservation efforts.

Local citizens start the process by filling in the National Register nomination forms. These are then submitted to the State Historic Preservation Commission. This review board makes its recommendations to the State Historic Preservation Officer. If approved, it is then submitted to the National Park Service at the Department of the Interior.

During the review period for nominations, local property owners and authorities are notified. All property owners are given the opportunity to make comments, concur or object to the nomination. If the majority of the property owners in a district object, the State Preservation Officer forwards the nomination only for determination of eligibility. He only nominates if the majority approve. Once the National Park Service approves the nomination, the property is officially entered in the National Register of Historic Places.

- **Evaluation Criteria.** The agencies and persons reviewing the application consider whether the architecture or archeological remains represent design, materials or workmanship typical of a particular era. Association may also be with key events, or historical personages. Structures or artifacts that have yielded, or may yield information important in prehistory or history are also eligible for the register. Normally sites less than 50 years old are not accepted, but there are many exceptions. It is best to write to the Department of Interior, Park Service, and find out for sure.
- **Meaning of Listing in the National Register of Historic Places.** Listing has the following results:

Recognition that a property is of significance to the nation, the state or the community, Federal agencies which propose funding, licensing or grant assistance for a project which may affect a property listed in or eligible to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places must allow the Advisory Council (the Maine Historic Preservation Commission) to comment. The purpose of the review is to assure that the value of historic properties is given direct consideration in project planning decisions. (This is why when the Maine Historic Preservation Commission commented that a bypass would be inconsistent with the Registration of the Wiscasset Historic District, the option of going through the village was eliminated.)

Similarly, the Maine Department of Environmental Protection's Site Location of Development law, regulating large-scale developments, requires a review by the Maine Historic Commission.

Additionally, the local planning board can request a review when considering a subdivision

application.

Preservation tax incentives are available for any project which the Secretary of the Department of Interior designates as a certified rehabilitation of a certified historic structure.

Federal, estate and gift tax deductions for charitable contribution of easements in real property must be exclusively for conservation purposes.

Qualification for federal assistance for historic preservation, when funds are available.

Listing on the National Register of Historic Places does not by itself preserve, but it gives credibility to efforts of private citizens and public officials to preserve these resources.

## **State Laws or Programs**

**Impact Review by the Maine Historical Commission.** The reason the proposed bypass could not go through downtown is that as noted above, any funding application to the federal or state government has to be reviewed for impact on a historic resource by the State Historic Preservation Commission. If a finding is made that a project to be funded by the state or the federal government is found to have a negative impact on a historic or archaeological resource, it is highly unlikely to be funded. The Maine Historic Preservation Commission has made the determination that the bypass would have had a negative impact on the Historic District.

**The Maine Site Location Law.** The Department of Environmental Protection must issue a permit on any development that may have a “substantial impact on the environment.” Any project in excess of 20 acres or which has more than three acres of disturbed surface that is not revegetated is subject to Department of Environmental Protection review and permit. When there is the possibility of impact on a historical resource, the application is sent to the Maine Historic Preservation Commission for its review and comment. When a structure or site is in the Register, that is a red flag for review (another advantage to being in the Register).

**Local Option Property Tax Reimbursement.** In 1999, the voters of Maine approved a constitutional amendment authorizing local reimbursement for expenditures for preserving historic or scenic views in accordance with a locally adopted preservation ordinance.

If towns want to participate in this program, then they must appropriate money to reimburse taxpayers. This reimbursement would be earmarked for that portion of real estate taxes used for the preservation of property in the National Register of Historic Places. Reimbursement would also be available for properties eligible for registration or identified as being of historic significance in the town’s comprehensive plan. This program has not been utilized by Wiscasset, but is a tool for encouraging preservation efforts, should the Town authorize the necessary funds.

**Designation as a Certified Local Government.** The intent of this program is to ensure that historic preservation issues are understood and addressed at the local level. Wiscasset can participate directly in the program when the State Historic Preservation Officer certifies that the Town has established its own Historic Preservation Commission and has a Historic Preservation Ordinance that meets federal and state standards. Please note that if the recommendations contained in this Plan are followed, Wiscasset will qualify for this designation.

Benefits of being a Certified Local Government (CLG) include opportunities to apply for grant funding available only to certified communities, state and national recognition for the quality of local preservation programs and projects, and technical advice from the Maine Historic Preservation Commission.

**Main Street Maine Program.** The Main Street Maine Program is a public/private partnership between the federal, state and local government and the downtown businesses and residents. The Program is administered in Maine by the Maine Downtown Center, located in the Maine Development Foundation. Its purpose is to promote downtown revitalization goals. The historic-built environment in each town defines its true character. The Main Street Maine Program encourages finding new and different uses for existing buildings and encourages appropriate new development that will protect and enhance this environment. Funding must come from all three levels of government. The Program recommends

that rural Main Street Maine towns under 5,000 in population have a minimum annual operating budget of \$25,000; these towns are required to hire paid staff for a minimum of 25 hours per week.

The suggested steps in establishing the program include:

1. Calling a town meeting to inform citizens about the program. Invitees should include all community players.
2. Inviting a representative from a Main Street community to speak at the meeting and inform the group about their local program.
3. Organizing a core group who will commit to doing a thorough investigation of the program.
4. Holding a second meeting inviting all who attended the first meeting to hear the results of the above investigations.
5. Beginning a media campaign to inform the community about Main Street.

The Maine Downtown Center's goal is to seek applications bi-annually depending on available funds. The town can sign up to be a member of the Maine Downtown Center's Contact List to receive regular updates about future application rounds and other downtown-related news.

## **Local Ordinances**

The only reference to historical resources indexed in the Wiscasset Land Use Ordinance is in Article VI.A.1.7, Performance Standard for the Shoreland Zone "Any activity involving structural development or soil disturbance on or adjacent to land listed or eligible to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, as determined by the permitting authority, building inspector or planning board, shall be submitted by the applicant to the Maine Historic Preservation Commission for review and comment, at least twenty (20) days prior to action being taken by the permitting authority." Historic Structure is defined in the Glossary of the Ordinance as:

- Listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or preliminarily determined by

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the Secretary of the Interior as meeting the requirements for individual listing in the National Register;

- Certified or preliminarily determined by the Secretary of the Interior as contributing to the historical significance of a registered historic district or a district preliminarily determined by the Secretary of the Interior to qualify as a registered historic district.

A provision for considering adverse impact on historic resources is by state law in the Subdivision Ordinance: “In reviewing an application, the Planning Board shall consider the following criteria, and before granting approval shall determine that the proposed subdivision: Will not have an undue adverse effect on the scenic or natural beauty of the area, aesthetics, historic sites or rare and irreplaceable natural areas ....etc.”

### **Potential Consequences of Inaction**

1. There is currently nothing in Wiscasset’s ordinances that prevents an individual from tearing down or demolishing a historic structure, even if it is in the National Register of Historic Places. Should a structure be demolished or burn, the property owner could rebuild in any style in the Historic District. Not only would a historic structure, a significant asset to the Town, be lost, but if rebuilt in a 20<sup>th</sup> Century style, an entire historic streetscape could be irreversibly lost.
2. Increased traffic locally and along Route One prior to the building of a “bypass,” whenever and wherever that may be located, could change the tenor of village life in an adverse manner and diffuse the sense of the Town’s center.
3. While the Town seeks to promote the historic and commercial aspects of both the village and waterfront, the demand for more parking lots could very well destroy the very historic character which draws the tourists.
4. Tourism drives commercial activity in the Village. Inappropriate conversions of historic structures or new development not consistent with the historic style could negatively impact the ambience of the village area streetscapes and the historic waterfront.
5. Natural disaster could destroy large parts of the historic district and waterfront. Without regulations for rebuilding, the small-town ambience and the nature of the historic district could be completely altered or lost altogether.
6. Increasing rail and marine traffic could either enhance or detract from current uses and the ambience of the historic village/waterfront areas.

### **Past Efforts and Studies**

**The 1989 Comprehensive Plan.** Much work, numerous surveys, and discussions in the preparation of the 1989 plan and as well as the 1999 plan update, along with the March 2004 visioning session clearly indicate public opinion supports historic preservation:

“The historic features of Wiscasset are a characteristic that citizens want to preserve. This was a high priority of the comprehensive planners and was supported consistently in the various citizen surveys.

Historic building preservation was most often cited as an important consideration in drawing up the comprehensive plan. Those surveyed supported strict regulations governing new buildings, renovation and use in the historic center of Town” (1989 Comprehensive Plan). The Implementation Plan was to prepare and adopt a Historic Preservation Ordinance.

**Inventory.** In 2000, the Maine Historic Commission awarded Wiscasset \$2,500 to record, in pictures and descriptions, all 200 houses within the Historic District. This project is completed. The data is housed at the Wiscasset Public Library. A desirable next step would be for volunteers or owners to search the deeds of all the houses in the Register.

**Historic Preservation Ordinance.** Over the past ten years, there have been three groups of interested citizens who recognized the importance of protecting our historic buildings in the District, but they disbanded before achieving their goals.

The selectmen asked the Ordinance Review Committee (ORC) to write an ordinance to protect the District. The ORC used as its models working ordinances in Kennebunkport, Topsham, Camden and Castine. The draft Ordinance was submitted to the Selectmen in the spring of 2002. As of the summer of 2006, no action has been taken.

## **Summary Findings**

Wiscasset’s Historic Village defines the community. The beautifully preserved 18<sup>th</sup> Century homes and 19<sup>th</sup> Century brick commercial buildings, are gems of their time and are an important part of our Maine coastal heritage

The village streetscape and its layout by the Sheepscot River presents a most appealing and defining view from the bridge and surrounding hills.

Wiscasset’s historic architecture and village attract tourists and new residents, many of whom choose to buy and lovingly restore the historic homes.

Surveys and visioning sessions most recently held on March 6, 2004, repeatedly rank Wiscasset’s venerable history as unique and place the highest priority on its preservation.

The designation of the village as a historic district and the inclusion of many historic homes in the National Register of Historic Places have brought national attention to Wiscasset.

The historic village is recognized by most townspeople as an economic asset.

A historic preservation ordinance is needed to assure the protection of this much-valued asset. Adoption of a historic preservation ordinance will require public understanding and support for the components of such an ordinance. This Plan contains recommendations aimed at generating that support.