

2019

History of Castine Maine

Town of Castine

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Repository Citation

Castine, Town of, "History of Castine Maine" (2019). *Maine History Documents*. 175.
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Official Travel Site for Castine Maine

CASTINE MAINE

Under The Elms And By The Sea

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Donut Demonstration at the Wilson Museum

Photo Credit Loi Thai

History of Castine

- > The Early Years
- > Prosperity & War
- > 1900's and Present Day

History of Castine

The French Hold on Castine

> Historic Organizations

In the 1630s the French built a fort here and called it Fort Pentagöet – the name used by the French to describe the Penobscot and its tributaries. Today, the fort lies beneath the plot of land next to the present Roman Catholic Church. The fort was part of France’s attempt to maintain and extend their control over “Acadia” – the name given to the region between the Kennebec and St. Croix Rivers. The Dutch briefly occupied Castine, once in 1674 and again in 1676, when they bombarded it from the bay. After coming ashore, they completely destroyed Fort Pentagöet. In 1713 Acadia became part of the British Empire.

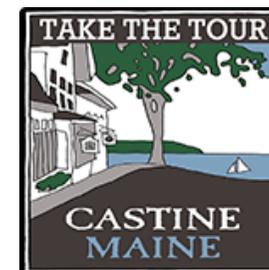
The earliest permanent settlement here began in the 1760s. One of the earliest settlers was John Perkins, whose home may still be seen on the street named after his family, although it has been relocated from its original site. By 1776 the town consisted of little more than twenty homes nestled on the south side of the peninsula.

Defeat: The Penobscot Expedition

In 1779 the British Royal Navy sent a detachment of troops here. They built a fort on the highest point of ground nearest the entrance to the bay and named it Fort George. The remains of the fort, now sometimes used as a softball field, are still here. The colonial Massachusetts Board of War resolved to send a combined naval and military expedition to recapture the area, but poor coordination, bickering commanders, inadequate training and inexplicable delay allowed the British to defend the Fort successfully, inflicting a humiliating defeat on the Americans. The details and narrative of the Penobscot Expedition are on display at the Castine Historical Society. In 1812 war broke out again between the British and the Americans, and in late 1814 the British arrived again, this time without opposition. During this second occupation, the British authorities collected customs duties, and when they left they took the money with them.

A Time of Great Prosperity

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Virtual Tour of Castine

Take the tour while you visit Castine, or in the comfort of your own home.

The years between the end of the War of 1812 and the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 marked Castine's greatest prosperity. That prosperity came largely from the sea, from fish, from the salt needed to preserve them, and from building the ships needed to catch them. In the springtime nearly five hundred fishing vessels could be seen in Castine's harbor awaiting salt, and over one hundred commercial sailing vessels were built here. Local ropewalks, sail lofts and ship chandlers provided all necessary goods and services for the maritime trade.

According to one source, in 1850 Castine had the second highest per capita wealth of any city or town in the United States. Street names such as Perkins, Dresser, and Dyer, are reminiscent of Castine's merchant families of the pre-Civil War era. Their wealth is still reflected in the Federal and Greek-Revival style homes along Main Street, Court Street, and Perkins Street.

157 Men Rally to the Call

When war broke out in 1861, Castiners rallied to the cause of the Union sending 157 men to serve. The Civil War statue on the Common was erected in 1881, a tribute to their memory. By then the fishing vessels that had once occupied the town's wharves were replaced by steamboats carrying tourists and summer visitors, sometimes called "rusticators", to Castine's hotels and summer "cottages."

Decline of Tourism in the Early 1900s

By the 1920s, more and more Americans traveled by automobile and fewer by railroad or steamboat. This impacted Castine's tourism, and many of the hotels of the 1880s and 1890s closed or were torn down. Today only two or three of them remain. In 1867 the Eastern Maine Normal School was founded to train hundreds of teachers for Maine's public schools. It closed in 1940, but one of its original buildings still stands on the campus of the present-day Maine Maritime Academy.



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Present Day Castine

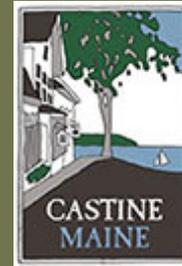
With the establishment of the Maine Maritime Academy in 1941, the town was given a new lease on life. Today its training ship State of Maine is docked in the harbor most of the year, a reminder not only of Castine's seafaring past, but of its role in the future. The casual visitor to Castine is usually most impressed by the number of 18th and 19th century Georgian and Federal houses still in existence and in perfect repair. Many summer people in Castine have carefully restored most of these beautiful old homes. Some of those summer residents were quite famous especially in literary circles.

Those interested in learning more about Castine and its history can visit the Wilson Museum on Perkins Street and the Castine Historical Society on the Town Common.



CASTINE TOWN OFFICE

Emerson Hall | P.O. Box 204 | 67 Court Street | Castine, Maine 04421
Phone: 207-326-4502 | Fax: 207-326-9465
Email: info@visitcastine.com



castine.me.us

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