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# History of Howland Maine

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# History of Community

## *A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF HOWLAND*

*By Gary Sage*

The Town of Howland is located north of the old Waldo grant on the west side of the Penobscot River. The village is located on the point of land where the Piscataquis and Penobscot Rivers meet.

It is thought that the point of land mentioned above was at one time a burial ground of the Red Paint People. This belief is supported by the fact that when the school building was built at this location, many skeletons along with pottery and weapons were found. These remains were surrounded with a red colored material, which is assumed to have been a custom of these people. The same type of evidence has been found in recent years when a new water and sewer line was laid.

Some of these findings can be seen today in the museum at Sieur de Mont Springs on Mount Desert Island, Maine. These were donated to the museum by the late John Ferguson of Howland. Others remain as family treasures in homes of residents of this town.

The name of the town was chosen by the signers of the petition for incorporating the town, in honor of John Howland (11592-1673) who came to this country on the Mayflower. He was the first agent at the Cushnoc (Augusta) post. In 1634 he shared his office with John Alden. He was the thirteenth signer of the Mayflower Compact and took part in the first encounter with the Indians at Plymouth in 1620. There is a story told by the residents of the town that the town got its name when an Indian from up the river came to get his bride to be. His journey took him down the river (neither one in particular) and as he approached the junction of the two rivers his canoe was caught by the swift current. As he sailed by the point where his bride to be was waiting he shouted, "How Land? How Land?"

Sometime before 1820, Major William C. Hammett of Massachusetts, and one William Emerson, purchased a tract of land north of the Waldo Patent. Mr. Hammett owned the land on the north side of the Piscataquis River and Mr. Emerson owned that on the south.

The years from 1818-1829, show a number of settlers arriving at Howland. In the year 1818, John Bryer, John Hook, Jeremiah Douglas, and Jacob Doe migrated here. In the year 1819 came Jeremiah Fifield, Jonathan Chase, Charles Davis, and William Douglas; 1820, Joseph Emery, Levi Lanchester, Dennis Carpernter, Thomas Tourtillot and Bart Moulton. In 1822, John Babcock; in 1823, John Smart, Duty Inman, Daniel Inman, and Stephen Tourtillot; in 1824, John Shaw, William Hammett, Wm. C. Hammett, Rufus Atkinson, Moses Emerson, John Haley, Wm. P. Miller, Tristram Scammon and James Merrill; and in 1828, Wm. S. Lee settled here.

Major Hammett settled here. His home was located about three miles up the Piscataquis River from the present bridge. Across the road, located in a grove of birch and southern pine, is the old family graveyard. Here his son, John Howland, and Wm. Cushing are buried. It is thought that many of the townspeople that the town was named for John, however, as shown previously, this is a misconception. The farm of the Major is still known today as the Hammett Farm. Wm. C. Hammett, the Major's son, served at one time as a state representative, as Collector of Custom at Bangor during General Taylor's term and was very prominent up to about 1676.

The Honorable William Miller immigrated to Howland in 1624. He made large investments in timberlands and mills. He was also a member of the State Legislature. Colonel Wm. S. Lee was the only colonist in the year 1828. He obtained his title in the state militia.

The first formal religion in Howland, which is recorded, is Baptist. In 1839, Elder Elias McGregor came to this town and started the first organized religion. From this time until 1896, there seems to be no recorded available. In this year a chapel was being used for services; it was located opposite the present day church, which is on the left side of Main Street, north of York Street. In 1896, Mr. Young was the Baptist minister and the chapel was still being used. It was getting very run down, so Mr. Young decided to refurbish it; however, after soliciting for donations, he found his parishioners more generous toward building a new church. (Mr. Young was a state missionary) In the year 1899, construction was started on the new church. This church served the people until 1929 when it burned to the ground. A new church was started immediately and during the winter of 1920 it was completed at a cost of \$10,000 (furnishings and all). The bell was donated by a Dover, Maine firm. In the 1950's, a new foundation was built and renovation was undertaken; this work was done at an approximate cost of \$35,000 which was donated by the late Harry Weymouth.

In 1899, Miss Emma Shaw became superintendent of the Sunday School and at the same time was made treasurer of the building committee. She served as superintendent for forty-nine years. Mr. Winfred Smart was in charge of building the church in 1929.

As to other religions, little is recorded or known. The Methodist Church was built before the Baptist Church. It is assumed to have been built around the 1880's or early '90's and it is located on Coffin Street. The Catholic Church was built in 1947 and is located on the River Road.

The first known school was located below the large bridge across the Penobscot River, on what is know as the Carver or Argyle Road. School was also held in what is known today as the town equipment building, located on Willow Street, beside the present firehouse. The old Russell Store was also used as a schoolhouse. This later became the property of the Weymouth family, and came to be known as the Pool Room. It was later used for a warehouse and in 1960 it was dismantled. It was located behind the clothing store and at the foot of the Piscataquis Bridge.

In 1901, a schoolhouse was built on the point of land between the two rivers and on what was supposed to be the Red Paint burial ground. It was at first used as a grammar school. In 1922, an addition was made and the first high school was started and remained in this building until 1952.

In 1927, the Ring Street School was constructed and is still used as an elementary school. This is located on the west side of the Piscataquis River, off the River Road. In 1951, a new high school was under construction and was completed in 1952 and located off Cross Street.

The economy of the town was mainly based on lumbering as few farms were in the township. A dam was built across the Penobscot River by the Piscataquis Pulp and Paper Company. Samuel Montague was the head of building it and the town of Montague is named after him.

The first recorded dam to be built across the Piscataquis River was on Sept. 13, 1881, one year after the dam on the Penobscot River was supposed to be built. The first dam was wooden and owned by Thomas Egery of Bangor. He built a small sawmill on the eat side of the dam. The point of land on which the mill was built no longer exists; it extended approximately a quarter of the way across the dam. It must have been washed out by overflow of the dam. After the wooden dam was constructed, the Searsport Spool and Box Company built a large sawmill in the approximate spot where the smaller one was. This mill burned at a later date.

The river was used for driving logs to the mills. The Penobscot saw much more traffic than the Piscataquis; however, this was the river which meant the most to the town. One half mile from the dam is what was called the sorting gap. Here all logs, being driven, were stopped by booms and they were sorted. Those belonging to the mills in town were boomed and held there. The logs or pulp belonging to others further down the river were allowed to go on down the river. Long logs and pulp were driven in amounts of about 15 to 20 million feet of both. The logs were piled across from the present A & P store or mill yard. These piles were approximately 40 feet high and 200 feet back. There were large rafts in the river for men to stand on, in order to enable them to get the logs to shore. The pulp was piled by carriers in the winter.

There was another method used for transporting logs and pulpwood. During the winter the logs and pulp were hauled by horses. Pulp was hauled on what is called jumper sleds. These were hauled by two or three teams of horses. The jumpers were made by using double runners bound together by two hardwood poles.

In the same year, a wooden mill was constructed somewhere near the present mill site; it was known as the Howland Falls Pulp Co. In 1893, the mill burned and the same year a brick factory was constructed. This was a sulfite mill. January 1897 saw the last of it, when it went through bankruptcy. However, it had stopped all payments on December 15, 1896. It was re-instated the same year and ran for approximately eighteen months under John C. Gerald who was assigned. The fall of 1897 showed a reorganization under the name of Howland Pulp Co. This firm ran until 1904, when in March of that year it was sold to a man by the name of Babbett, who formed the Howland Pulp and Paper Company. This was the most successful venture of this type undertaken up to date. It ran until April 1916, when it was sold to E. P. Lindsey, who formed the Howland Pulp and Paper Corporation. It would appear that pulp and paper wasn't a very good paying business because two more companies tried "to make a go of it" and failed. On January 1, 1921, the paper corporation merged with the Advance Bag and Paper Co. of Middletown, Ohio, and took the name of the Advance Bag and Paper, Inc. This was located where the present day Pine Tree Tannery is. The Advance Bag and Paper Inc. brought prosperity; the town and commercial businesses started to flourish. The same story is told all over again; in March 18, 1939, this firm closed its doors for good. It moved all its equipment to the south; I believe Biloxi, Mississippi is the place they moved to then. This firm installed running water in the home of Charles Colbath, which is located at the corner of the LaGrange Road and Coffin Street, and also into Vone's store which is on the east side of the Colbath house. This company also gave presents to all employees. They also put in a power plant for electricity.

In 1940 the Atlas Plywood Co., Inc. bought the buildings owned by the Advance Bag and paper Inc. In the same year the plywood company and the Gilman Paper Co. or The Northern Kraft, moved into the buildings not occupied by the "plywood".

The Atlas Plywood Co. manufactured plywood crates for shipping such goods as refrigerators, shoes, military equipment and others. This firm was one which survived on government contracts during World War II. In the year 1955 the plant closed down and moved out.

The Northern Kraft mill made only kraft as the name implies. They obtained its raw materials from the surrounding area. They also maintained a large network of booms and piers in the Piscataquis River. Along both banks and in the mill yard, there were always large piles of pulpwood which was stored there until they were needed. In 1949, this firm closed down as many had before.

1950 saw the St. Regis Paper Co. come to town. This firm also manufactured kraft the same as the Northern Kraft. This was another "fly by night" company. I use the term "fly by night" to mean one who doesn't stay in town long. This firm left the town in the year 1952.

1957 was the year that the industry, which seems to be the last resort of many a Maine town, came to Howland. The Pine Tree Tannery is the present, fairly large, firm in town. It seems to be doing rather well. This Christmas, the tannery instituted profit sharing; this made the

townspeople very happy. My opinion, on first thought, would be that a firm that would use profit sharing is only protecting itself against unionism. However, time will tell.

There is also, at the present time, a lumber firm in Howland. This company is owned by two men from town. (South Branch Lumber Company) It employs about forty men. They manufacture oars and paddles, which are shipped all over the country, Puerto Rico, and they also manufacture rough finished limber.

The first blacksmith shop was constructed where the present day Cozy Corner Café is, at the foot of the bridge hill. (Today, 2002, the Corner Store is located on this lot.) It was owned by a Mr. McGuire. Then Bert Eldridge and Harry Howard had shops on the second lot, east side of the LaGrange Road.

About six miles north of the town on the road to Seboeis, there is a large area which appears to be a swamp; however, it was at one time a natural lake. Mr. Frederick Russell, by some means known, discovered a deposit of material which could be used for making paint. In the year 1904, Mr. Russell formed the Northern Manufacturing Co. The land at the time was owned by the Adams family of Bangor, Maine. It was bought by Russell's company and in 1910, work was started to drain the lake. It was drained once before in the 1860's or 1870's and was used as a hay farm; the outlet became clogged and the farm flooded to a depth of 15 or 20 feet. The job of draining the lake was undertaken by Mr. Peter Haverlock. A tunnel was dug from the opposite side of the lake, under the road. Nothing was constructed on the lake side or the road to control the drainage once it had started. While several men were digging the tunnel, one stuck a pick pole into the undug end; when it was pulled out, water came with it and the whole lake proceeded to follow. The men in the tunnel barely escaped being washed down the stream. The flowing started at noon and by supertime (assuming 5 hours) it was completely drained. It washed the road out, leaving about a 75-yard gap in it. There was a boom of logs in the Seboeis Stream, which the lake drained into, and the force of the water broke them loose, carrying them downstream where they caught on a steel bridge forcing it from its piers and carrying it downstream. The town of Howland sued the company for the cost of repairing the damage. The full costs weren't received but \$5,000 was a settlement. After all the trouble, clay was finally taken from the land and a factory was constructed in Bangor, Maine where paint was manufactured; however, the paint was a low-grade quality and the company couldn't compete with other companies with their product, so this company finally folded.

In summation, the settlement of the town of Howland started around 1800. This was twenty years before Major Hammett and Mr. Emerson purchased the township. In 1815, Levi Lanchester came up the Penobscot by boat to survey the land for William Hammett. In 1816, Willis Lanchester and John Randall settled in Howland.

The population growth was that of a moderate rate, however, in the early 1900's there were more people who claimed residence here than do at the present time.

The many rivers and streams afforded natural transportation and power for mills. Many small mills were constructed and two of them are still used, somewhat, today. Several pulp factories were built here but none of them exist today. In 1909, Mr. Lovejoy owned a water-powered mill and in this year the salmon were so numerous that he was forced to shut the mill down. The only industries remaining in Howland today are the Pine Tree Tannery and the South Branch Lumber Company. (Today, 2002, neither industry is in operation.) Up until 1893, ferries operated by Levi Lanchester, Rance Nason and Leslie Clapp were used to cross the river but none exist today.

At present time, there are three schools in use, namely the Front Street School, Ring Street School and the Howland High School.

The first jail consisted of one metal cell which was purchased in 1908, and placed in one of the abandoned schools. The cell was later moved into the town hall.

The first fire department was organized in 1922; today the town still has a volunteer fire department. Its equipment is limited to two trucks which not only serve the town but also many surrounding ones.

Howland is similar to many other towns in that it has experienced industrial booms and several severe "lows".

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Official Website of Howland, Maine.

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