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# History of New Gloucester Maine

Town of New Gloucester

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**APPENDIX B**  
**TOWN HISTORY**

New Gloucester, Maine is a town rich in history with many beautiful early homes, and rural characteristics. The town was incorporated in 1774 as the 29<sup>th</sup> town in what was then a part of Massachusetts, and only thirty-nine years after sixty inhabitants of Gloucester, Massachusetts petitioned the General Court of Massachusetts for a tract of land six miles square above North Yarmouth. This was granted in 1737, and that same year John Millett was sent to cut a road from Cousins' River in North Yarmouth to the center of the town.

The name, New Gloucester, was chosen in the hopes that the town would be to the new settlers what the Town of Gloucester, Massachusetts had been to their fathers. In 1739, a few settlers came and the first clearing was made by Jonas Mason on Lot No. 10 on the easterly side of Harris Hill, now known more commonly as Gloucester Hill. During these years there were nineteen frame homes built and a sawmill erected on Stevens Brook. However, because of the threat of Indians, the town was soon abandoned and the settlers went to North Yarmouth or back to Gloucester, Massachusetts. The houses and mill were burned by the Indians and it was several years before there was another attempt to settle the town. In 1753, when settlers again came, a blockhouse was built for protection. Here, twelve families lived for several years until peace had been declared and the Indian threat had passed. Houses were again built and the town started to grow. The mill on Stevens Brook was rebuilt, more roads were constructed and other mills including a grist mill and sawmill were build on the Great Falls on Royall's River at Upper Gloucester.

On November 22, 1763, the first meeting of the Proprietors was held in the blockhouse, for all previous meetings were held in Massachusetts. That same year Rev. Samuel Foxcroft was called to be the minister in the new town, but it was not until 1838 that the first Congregational Church was built.

On September 7, 1774, the Town of New Gloucester was incorporated and the necessary officers elected. In 1792, the town became a half-shire town with Portland remaining as such until the organization of Oxford County in 1805. Courts were held in the old schoolhouse and the jury rooms were in the Bell Tavern kept by Peleg Chandler

Lumber and agriculture were the important industries of the town, and as more people arrived and the town grew, more services were needed, too. According to the records of 1825, there were five stores and five taverns. In 1860 there were six sawmills, tow tanneries, and two gristmills on the various streams and Royall's River. During these years there were one-room schoolhouses scattered throughout the town. These small schools continued until the Memorial School was built in 1950, between the Upper and Lower Villages. Since joining with Gray to form SAD 15, the Memorial School has become a Grammar School for students up through the sixth grade with the older students attending the Junior and Senior High Schools in Gray. In the late 1800's, high school classes were held in homes and there were private schools which provided education above the grammar school level. These included the Steven's School, the Yeaton School for Boys, and the Bailey Home School. In 1902, the present New Gloucester High School was built and continued until the new high school was established in Gray in 1962. At the present time this building is leased by the New Gloucester Historical Society and is used for various activities by this group and others through the summer months. It is used during the school year for public kindergarten classes.

By 1775, some of the settlers objected to paying taxes to support the Congregational minister, Rev. Samuel Foxcroft, and this was the beginning of other religions in New Gloucester. In 1790, the "Baptist Religious Society of New Gloucester and Gray" was incorporated. In 1801, this was divided and in 1803 the New Gloucester members formed the Baptist Society of New Gloucester. Through the years there were several different Baptist Societies, but eventually there was only one, which in 1971 voted to change its name to "The New Gloucester Bible Church." In the late 1920's, the first church burned but, through the efforts of the congregation, a new building was built on the same site. A larger church was built across the road a few years ago.

The Shakers first came to New Gloucester in 1782, and the first meeting was held in the home of Gowan Wilson Sr. The meeting house was built and ready for use on Christmas Day in 1794, and still stands with its original paint as bright as when it was first done. Other buildings soon followed and the community reached its peak in the 1800's. The community is still active although the number of members has declined through the years. The Shakers complex on Route 26 is a popular attraction with its museum and gift shop.

After having held meetings for several years, the "First Universalist Society of Christians in New Gloucester" was incorporated in 1805. This included members from surrounding towns but in 1838 the members from New Gloucester and Pownal withdrew and formed their own Society. In 1839 the church on Route 231 was built and is one of the oldest Universalist Society is no longer in existence in New Gloucester, but the building is owned and maintained by the New Gloucester Historical Society. Today the building is being renovated with partial funding from the Maine State Historic Preservation Commission. A series of programs (speakers and concerts) and religious services are held there each year.

The first railroad, known as the Atlantic and St. Lawrence came through New Gloucester in 1848. It was later known as the Grand Trunk Railway but is now owned by the Canadian National Co. The Maine Central Railroad, which originally ran from Cumberland to Danville, came in 1870. Passenger, as well as freight, service were offered by both railroads. However, when buses and automobiles increased and passengers used the railroads less, this service was discontinued. Another railroad was "The Portland Lewiston Interurban," an electric railroad which made several stops in New Gloucester. This railroad was in operation between 1914 and 1933 and also offered freight and passenger service between Portland and Lewiston.

Previous to 1886, the First Baptist Church was used for a town meeting house, but in that year the new Town Hall was built and dedicated. This building received extensive renovations a few years ago to make it more convenient. In 1888, two years after the Town Hall was built, a library was started on the lower floor. In 1896 the present Library Building was built, which now serves the townspeople, old and young.

In 1890, the farm of Jacob Osgood Haskell, on the bank of Royall's River at Upper Gloucester, was purchased and a race track built. An exhibition hall and horse sheds were soon added and here the New Gloucester and Danville Agricultural Association held an annual fair for many years. Now the grounds and track are used for boarding and training race horses.

The Pine Tree Tel. and Tel. Co. began operation in 1899, and has continued as a private company, now serving Gray as well as New Gloucester. At the town meeting in 1928, money was raised to pay for the first fire truck. That same year the Fire Department was formed and money raised to build a Fire Station at Lower Gloucester in which to house the

truck. From that small building, New Gloucester now has a Fire Department and Rescue Squad of which to be very proud.

During the 1800's there was a growth of organizations, both social and those who worked to better the community. One of the first to be organized was the Cumberland Lodge of Masons. On August 2, 1803, their first meeting was held in a private hall at Upper Gloucester. In 1852, the first hall was built by the Lodge. This was used for fifty years until they built and moved into the present brick hall, also at Upper Gloucester. Boaz Royal Arch Chapter No. 72 received its Charter October 29, 1926 and the Golde Sheaf Chapter No. 114 of the Eastern Star was instituted April 7, 1904. These organizations continue to be active.

The New Gloucester Grange No. 28 was organized in 1874 with 18 Charter Members. Meetings were first held in the old Town Hall. From 1885-1897 they met in the Bear Brook Grange Hall on the North Pownal Road. Their next meeting place was over the old blacksmith shop at Lower Gloucester. In 1926 the new Grange Hall was built and was used for many years. This building is now the cabinet shop of Thomas Moser. The grange also used the old Lower Corner Schoolhouse for a place to meet until, due to lack of interest, they gave up their Charter a few years ago.

Another Grange, Sabbath Day Lake Grange No. 365, was established November 15, 1990, with 26 Charter Members. They first met in the Walter Brackett Hall on Rte. 26 and were incorporated April 28, 1903 with 107 members. In the fall that same year they built their new hall located at the end of Sabbath Day Lake. The group is a very active one, have made many improvements in their hall since it was built and have an active Junior Grange, too. The latter group, Sabbath Day lake Juvenile Grange No. 121 was organized August 11, 1994. The name was changed to "Junior" Grange in 1965 by the National Grange.

Girl Scouts has been an up and down thing since 1940, but is presently active. The Brownie Scouts, for girls in the first, second and third grades, have been more fortunate and have been active since 1971 when Troop No. 203 was established. For several years, the Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts have had very active troops with good leadership.

There have been some groups which are no longer in existence such as the "Women's Club" which was active in the early 1900's and the Lend-a-Hand Society, but there are many others which have survived through the years.

The women of the Congregational Church formed the Ladies Circle in 1883 with 41 members. Suppers and sales were held to defray costs of buying items for the vestry and church, including candles for lighting the two buildings. The Evening Guild was formed in 1962, which gave younger working women or those with small children a chance to meet and be active in the projects of the church. An annual fair is held in the fall by these groups to raise money to help on the expenses of the church. The Baptist Church also has various church-related organizations, such as the Pioneer Girls Club for the girls, organized in 1957 and a Christian Service Brigade for boys which started in 1965. The Ladies Missionary Society meets once a month in homes to work on missionary projects.

Another of the early organizations was Mishawaka Tribe No. 115 of the order of Red Men instituted by forty men on March 17, 1920. The National motto is "Freedom, Friendship and Charity" and the local group had an Evening Extension group started. Both groups have remained active and each year choose a community project on which to work.

The New Gloucester High School Alumni Association was formed in 1905 and consisted of member of the Classes of 1902, 1903, and 1904, twenty graduates in all. Each year at

the annual banquet, the class graduating from High School was voted into the organization as members. In the years preceding 1949, attendance was small and, instead of a banquet, a luncheon for the Senior Class and teachers was held. In 1950, the Fiftieth Anniversary of the start of the High School was celebrated with a reception at the Congregational Church Vestry with about 150 Alumni members and guests present. A banquet was held again that year and has continued since with a yearly attendance of over 100 members and guests.

Lunn-Hunnewell Amvet Post No. 6 was chartered in 1951 with 15 Charter Members. The first meetings were held in Centennial Hall in Upper Gloucester. With much hard work by the members, the new hall on Route 100 was built and dedicated in 1962. This group has accomplished a great deal for they are active in Civilian Defense, Community Service, as blood donors, etc., as well as Halloween and Christmas parties for the children and senior citizens of New Gloucester and patients at Togus and in nursing homes. The auxiliary was formed in 1952 with ten Charter Members. They work with the Amvets to raise money for the various projects undertaken by the two groups. Their membership has now risen to over eighty.

The Health Council was started by Dorothy Chandler and several other interested women shortly after the Memorial School was built. There have been many who have been involved with the Council and now clinics, immunizations, eye and ear tests, etc., are given by Mrs. Peter Wills at the schools. Mrs. Wills is the School Nurse and also a member of the Health Clinic.

Another group, whose work is visible in the summer, is the New Gloucester Garden Club which was organized in 1960, and a short time ago joined with the Gray group. According to their Bylaws "the purpose of the New Gloucester Garden Club is to study horticulture and to encourage community beautification through conservation and replenishment of our natural resources." Among their projects have been landscaping at the Memorial School, window boxes on the public buildings and making and maintaining the small park at Upper Gloucester at the intersection of Routes 231 and 100.

The Remember When Senior Citizens Club was organized in 1969. In addition to the meeting held twice a month, trips are planned for the members. A hot meal is served at the meetings and games or a speaker are enjoyed in the afternoon.

In 1970 a group of local snowmobile enthusiasts formed the "Royal River Riders" Snowmobile Club. The group is an active one, having rallies, Christmas parties and picnics for the members. They have marked and maintained trails in New Gloucester and from a small beginning have grown to be a successful group whose objective is to encourage family participation and safety in a most enjoyable sport.

One of the well-known landmarks of New Gloucester is the Opportunity Farm, a home for homeless boys. These buildings which include the dormitories and large barn dominate the top of Gloucester Hill which commands a beautiful view of the intervale area of New Gloucester. It was June 14, 1912, that it was incorporated and two farms were purchased to house the boys. For many years schooling was provided for the boys at the farm, but now the boys attend the public schools. An average of around forty boys are provided a home-type atmosphere where each boy has daily chores to do.

The Maine School for the Feeble-Minded was established by the Legislature in 1907, as a hospital for mentally handicapped persons. The buildings and land are mainly in New Gloucester. Several years ago the name was changed to Pineland Training Center, and each client is trained as much as possible to care for themselves. In more recent years, it

was found that many clients were capable of living in the community so the number of those living at Pineland has decreased.

There have been many changes in New Gloucester since the first settlers arrived in 1739. Commuters now make their homes in New Gloucester, and the nearby cities are growing steadily toward the Town. The ultimate challenge to today's residents is to preserve and maintain the Town's rural characteristics in the face of this change.