

# Final Draft

## Chapter 1

### HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

#### The Setting

Bridgton is located in the scenic hills and lakes region of southwestern Maine. This region stretches from the low, sandy timberlands surrounding Sebago Lake in the east and rises to the west through numerous ridges and elevations to the summit of Mount Washington in the White Mountains. The Town is located in the northwest corner of Cumberland County, approximately 40 miles from Portland, 45 miles from Lewiston-Auburn in Androscoggin County and 25 miles from North Conway, New Hampshire.

Bridgton's 64 square miles encompass several lakes, ponds and high ridges with large tracts of mixed forests and some remaining agricultural lands. The central village lies between Highland Lake and Long Lake, approximately 300 feet above sea level.

#### Incorporation and Town Government

*"Two centuries and more ago the area east of the Saco River in which the Bridgton township lies was known as Pondicherry, a name of uncertain origin, but probably applied to the wilderness tract because of the abundance of wild cherries and the numerous ponds visible from the summit of Pleasant Mountain."* (Source: Bridgton, Maine 1768-1868)

The grant which formed Pondicherry Township was confirmed by the Massachusetts Legislature on February 24, 1763. At that time, Maine was still a region under the jurisdiction of Massachusetts. The township was commonly called Pondicherry for perhaps a couple of years until in 1767, the Proprietors named their tract for the man who undoubtedly had been the most influential in securing the grant, Moody Bridges. "Bridge's Town" was, over time, shortened to "Bridgton." (Source: Bridgton, Maine 1768-1968).

The first town meeting was held March 18, 1794, and town meetings continue to be the means by which policies are set and laws are made.

#### The Residents and Their Economy

It was most likely the tribes of the Sokokis and/or the Anasagunticooks, members of the Abanaki Nation, who populated this region for many thousands of years prior to the arrival of Europeans. The same bounty of woods, lakes and streams that sustained these peoples also attracted the new settlers, who claimed the land as theirs.

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From early beginnings as a European settlement, the Town of Bridgton has been an assortment of neighborhoods and communities dispersed over some 40,000 acres. The first settler, Captain Benjamin Kimball, established his store and hostelry on the shores of Long Lake in the North Bridgton section in 1768. A few years later, several of those early residents coming from the Andover-Boxford area of Massachusetts selected South Bridgton for their farms and homesteads. An indication of this continuing dispersion of the settlement over the landscape is the disclosure that there were at one time twenty-two autonomous school districts within the boundaries of the town, a system that was finally abolished in 1885.

Although the proprietors of the land grant may have selected a location on South High Street for the ministerial lot and the site of the combination meeting-house and town hall, it was in South Bridgton and North Bridgton that growth in population and "clearings" first occurred. The town grew in pockets of satellite design rather than spreading out from the Center, which in reality, came later in the wake of industrial expansion. Today, four distinct communities, the Village, North Bridgton, West Bridgton, and South Bridgton exist as well as smaller pockets of settled areas and residences which line the lakeshores and roadways of Bridgton.

In the early days, as the demand for services and materials grew, so did the Village. At just about the same time that Captain Kimball was establishing his headquarters in West Cove, Jacob Stevens was setting up his sawmill and gristmill where the outlet of Highland Lake flows into Long Lake. This was the first utilization of a waterway which determined the economy, growth and prosperity of Bridgton for at least 150 years. The stream still bearing Mr. Stevens' name at one time provided waterpower at twelve different locations serving a variety of mills and industries. And when the hydropower of this brook became overtaxed, the principal enterprises were already in place for conversion to other forms of energy.

Although many small and medium-sized businesses, such as tanneries, wood-working mills, door and sash manufacturers, flourished at several locations, it was the woolen industry that provided the impetus for Bridgton's development and business expansion. Rufus Gibbs was the pioneer and promoter of this emphasis on woolen mills together with many other lucrative personal interests. His Cumberland Mill at the foot of Main Hill (financed by lumbering and real estate dealings) provided the beginning at the midpoint of the 19th century. This action was followed by the construction of the Pondicherry Mill at the intersection of Portland and Main Streets in time to capitalize on the business generated by the Civil War. Somewhat later, the Forest Mills Company entered the production of fabrics and these three mills provided employment for more than 400 hands at the time of peak production.

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The industry, together with a variety of lesser but essential enterprise, created the demand for housing construction and commercial expansion and sparked an enthusiasm for connecting the town by rail with the outside world. The Bridgton and Saco River Railroad (1883-1940) was built essentially for freight transport and until highway services were developed to a reliable level, performed a vital function for all local businesses. Among the more obvious reasons for increased transportation capacities was a growing need for coal to provide the power that the various mills required and which exceeded what the little brook could supply.

The evolution of the residential and commercial areas of the Village began in the vicinity of Main Hill and worked southward generally along the course of this same Stevens Brook. Houses on High Street and those streets connecting with Main Street were among the first permanent homes and in many instances began as farm properties. The residential area south and east of Pondicherry Square was developed to a large extent by Frederick J. Littlefield and coincided with the growth in mill construction and employment. At the height of this post Civil War period of growth and prosperity, Bridgton could rightfully claim to be the trading center of western Maine. The town clung to this contention with conviction until the advent of the automobile and the advance of paved roads, which occurred in the 1920's.

The woolen industry in general began to falter shortly after World War I and all of New England was affected. American Woolen Company had taken over the Forest Mill operation and Deering, Milliken and Company of Portland owned the Pondicherry Mill property, which also included the Cumberland or so-called Gibbs Mill. Pondicherry Mill was the last survivor of the three and the Great Depression just about silenced the looms. The mill was operated marginally until the early 1950's.

Apart and aloof from the industrial and commercial sector, to a large degree, has been a resort business which began much earlier than is generally realized. There were hotels such as the Cumberland and Bridgton House catering to summer vacationers as far back as 1860. In 1897, a total of fifteen inns and boarding houses welcomed summer guests and a number of lakefront cottages were available for rent.

Summer resort operations in the Bridgton area have been subject to dramatic change. Hotels and inns, popular at the turn of the century, faded into near oblivion after the Great Depression and gave way to summer cottage communities, motels and, more recently, campsites that appeal to a special type of vacationer. A further transition is now in progress as rental cottages, in particular, are being acquired by non-resident owners as vacation homes for both summer and winter occupancy and second homes are being privately purchased or constructed along the lake shores and in outlying areas. The actual accommodations available to the summer tourist, at present, are fewer than was the case twenty-five years ago.

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Unfortunately, Bridgton's manufacturing base has suffered along with the rest of the State. Malden Mills closed its Bridgton Knitting Mills operation and more recently Sebago, Inc. closed its Pleasant Mountain Moc division. These closures removed hundreds of jobs from their peak rates. Dielectric Communications and Acorn Manufacturing also came and went and the Town has suffered a net loss of several hundred manufacturing jobs between 1994 and 2010.

### Historical and Cultural Resources

In order to qualify as a true community, it has been said that a place must have meaning, identity and provide a sense of orientation. When a place is meaningful for its residents, it "makes sense", and offers feelings of safety and comfort. Having identity means that a place is distinguished from all other places. Identity comes from having a visible and understandable history—residents should be able to recognize the community's heritage, where it has come from, and the part it has played in a world of constant change. A sense of orientation is derived from the presence of historical and cultural landmarks. Landmarks are the result of the residents' ability, over time, to identify with the town and to find meaning in its landscape. (Elizabeth Brabec, "Town Character: Towards a Useable Definition," March, 1988).

A community's unique history should provide the perspective through which current trends are viewed. This background should also provide the context for long-range planning. In attempting to shape current and future change, and to direct growth in positive ways, a community should preserve and build upon those unique aspects of its character that provide residents with meaning, identity and orientation.

The Town of Bridgton is rich in landmarks which provide an ever-present link with its past. Until the 1987 plan, it was requested that "the Bridgton Historical Society, with the assistance of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, update its inventory of historic sites and structures, promote inclusion of significant properties to the National Register, develop an historical sites map, and consider establishing Site markers." Following is an update of that inventory, and these sites are displayed on the Town of Bridgton Historic Resources Map. Although not included in this Plan, the Historic Resources Map was used in the development of the Future Land Use Map, and it may be viewed at the Town Office.

### Sites on National Register of Historic Places

Over the past 30 years in Bridgton, the following sites have been placed on the National Register through the efforts of the individual property owners. At present, there is no organized effort in the town to register eligible buildings and sites.

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(Numbers correspond to the Bridgton Historical Resources map; sites are noted by red dots):

1. "Narramissic," The Peabody-Fitch House, Off Ingalls Road, South Bridgton
2. South Bridgton Congregational Church, Fosterville Road
3. "Stone House". Burnham Road
4. "Far Hills," The Benjamin Cleaves House, South High Street
5. Walker Memorial Hall, Lower Ridge Road, Bridgton Highlands
6. Farnsworth Mansion, Route 117, North Bridgton
7. Wales and Hamblen Building, Main Street
8. Dalton Holmes Davis Memorial, The Bridgton Public Library, Main Street
9. William F. Perry Mansion, Six Main Hill

### **Sites with Possible National Register Eligibility**

These sites fit all of the criteria of eligibility for the National Register. They are considered important historical "anchors" in the town, in that they are identified with particular geographic areas. (Letters correspond to the Bridgton Historic Resources map; sites are noted by green dots):

- a. Johnson-Boggs House
- b. Fessenden-Rankin-Parker House
- c. Camp Pondicherry
- d. Sandy Creek Schoolhouse
- e. Stone-Cook-Richards House
- f. Camp Winona
- g. Martin-Redfield-Chalmers House
- h. Braun-Kinney House
- i. Tarry-A-While Resort
- j. Fremstead-Darnielle Cottage
- k. Ingalls Grove
- l. Clark-Ring Farm
- m. Fox-Perry Artist Colony
- n. Smith Mill
- o. Advent Church
- p. Methodist Church
- q. Congregational Church
- r. Gibbs-Giata's Mansion
- s. Littlefield-Simpson Mansion
- t. Bridgton Academy
- u. Kitson House and Pottery Site
- v. Bridgton Historical Society Museum (former fire station with intact hose tower)

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### Areas Eligible for Possible Historic District Designation (National Register and/or Local)

The following areas also meet the criteria for eligibility for the National Register. Additionally, South Bridgton village and North High Street are areas which are considered important historical areas by the Maine Historic Preservation Commission. (Letters correspond to the Bridgton Historic Resources map, and areas are colored in blue):

- A. South Bridgton Village
- B. Highland Ridge
- C. Lower Village
- D. North and South High Streets/Main Hill
- E. North Bridgton Village

### Historic Graveyards

This list is compiled by the Bridgton Historical Society, and is used frequently by residents and others seeking to trace family histories. There are many more small family and neighborhood cemeteries, some on private land. (Numbers correspond to the Bridgton Historic Resources map, and areas are colored in red):

- 10. South Bridgton
- 11. Sandy Creek
- 12. South High Street
- 13. Forest Hills
- 14. Four Corners
- 15. North Bridgton
- 16. Glines Graveyard

### Open Land with Historic Significance

The following areas are privately owned, with the exception of Sabattus Island (also known as Winona's Island) in Moose Pond, which has been leased to the town by the State of Maine. They are considered areas of historic and/or scenic significance in Bridgton, and several are currently subject to development pressures. They are noted on the Historic Resources map as areas colored in green, but are not numbered or lettered:

- ▲ **Upper Ridge Road** - This area is known as the Linscott Farm. It is a scenic area of open fields with an intact 1830 farmhouse.

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- ⤴ **Del Chadbourne Road** - This is an unchanged 19th century gravel road overarched with trees. An intact 18th century farmhouse is set at the end of the road.
- ⤴ **Chadhourne Hill Road** - This is a drive through woods and fields, the road overarched with trees. It turns into the Del Chadhourne and Upper Ridge Roads mentioned above.
- ⤴ **Highland Ridge Road** - Scenic views of open fields, with unchanged historic buildings from the late 18th century to late 19th century. At the upper end of the road, one enters Ingall's Grove, an area of partly virgin forest.
- ⤴ **South Bridgton Village** - a nearly intact example of an 1800's agrarian village. Parcel north of South Bridgton, on Route 107 - this is the site of the Peabody home where the first church in Bridgton was founded. Religious services were held in a large room in the house, apparently constructed for the purpose, for seven years. The foundation of the house remains, and an historical marker was once placed there but has since been removed.
- ⤴ **Parcel north of the above site, just off Route 107 – "Bear Trap Mountain."** This is the site of a large stone cavern which was used in the early days of settlement for trapping bears. The site was noted in a Bridgton history written in the 1850's as an 'historical curiosity,' making it one of the earliest noted "historical sites" in New England.
- ⤴ **Base of Pleasant Mountain** - an open field situated at the corner of Route 302 and the Mountain Road, leading to Shawnee Peak Ski Resort. This parcel affords a beautiful view and a scenic entrance to the mountain. It has been under considerable development pressure in recent years.
- ⤴ **Sabattus Island (also known as Winona's Island) in Moose Pond** - scenic view of Pleasant Mountain. The island is owned by the State of Maine and has been leased on a long-term basis to the Town.
- ⤴ **Route 302 south of Bridgton** - There exists an area just north of the Naples line along Route 302 which is undeveloped and wooded. This stretch of highway provides a natural separation between the towns of Naples and Bridgton, giving the feeling that Bridgton is a distinct town. Additionally, this stretch of highway offers a spectacular view of the mountains framed by the trees along both sides of the road.

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- ▲ **Narramissic, the Peabody-Fitch Farm** – Owned and operated by the Bridgton Historical Society as a “museum, historical site, demonstration center for early American life and crafts, or like purposes.” In addition to a 1797 house, a ca. 1830s barn and functioning blacksmith shop, it encompasses 25 acres of open fields, with dramatic mountain views and access to short hiking trails, including connections to “Bear Trap Mountain,” listed above.

### Prehistoric Archaeological Sites

Seven prehistoric archaeological sites are on file with the Maine Historic Preservation Commission. These are identified as numbers 22.5, 22.9, 22.11, 22.12, 22.15, 22.16, and 22.63. These are on the Peabody Pond shoreline, on Stevens Brook, and the Long Lake Shoreline within one kilometer of Stevens Brook. The precise location of number 22.5 is not noted here, in order to protect it; however town officials may receive information on its location from the MHPC at the time protection measures are proposed. Sites that need further survey, inventory, and analysis are Bear River, the shorelines of Moose Pond, Highland Lake, and Long Lake, as well as other smaller brooks and ponds. With the exception of some of site 12.63 on Peabody Pond, the Town has not been surveyed by a prehistoric archaeologist.

### Historic Archaeological Sites

Four historic archaeological sites have been identified by the Maine Historic Preservation Commission in Bridgton - the Kittson Pottery Site (circa 1815 - 1890, ME 056-001), Keene Machine Shop (20<sup>th</sup> century ME 056-002), American Legion Hall (20<sup>th</sup> century ME 056-003) and “Narramissic”, the Peabody-Fitch Farm (18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century, ME 056-004). The Maine Historic Preservation Commission makes the following comment, "No professional historic archaeological survey has been conducted to date in Bridgton. The above-noted [Kittson Pottery] site was observed by a ceramics historian in the 1970's, but has not been archaeologically inspected. Future professional survey could focus on Anglo -American sites representing the earliest European settlement of the Town, which began in the 1760's." There are also ten water power sites, marking the location of mills along Stevens Brook between Highland Lake and Long Lake, which preserve important aspects of Bridgton's 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century industrial history. The locations of these sites are delineated on a map, produced by E.C. Jordan Co., Portland in 1902, which is in possession of the Bridgton Historical Society. A copy of this map has recently been placed on file with the MHPC, who will use it to identify these historic archaeological sites.



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## Threats to Historic and Archaeological Resources

One threat to historic and archaeological resources is simply that their significance, and sometimes even their existence, is unknown. Development, redevelopment, or the failure to maintain these sites can diminish or destroy these resources. On the other hand, widespread public knowledge of archaeological sites can increase the likelihood that they will be disturbed or vandalized. The appearance of development adjacent to an historic building or site has a significant impact. Incompatible design can destroy the visual effect of a nearby historic building and greatly reduce its value.

In addition to each site or structure's individual historic significance, collectively these resources play a strong role in determining the town character which distinguishes Bridgton from other towns in the region. The clusters of 18th and 19th century buildings in the Village, in South Bridgton, and in North Bridgton create the sense of distinct and unique communities. In the countryside, the large farmhouses surrounded by expanses of fields are central to the "rural character" loved by Bridgton residents and visitors; and the collections of camps dotting the lakes are significant links with the region's long-standing history as a resort area.

At the present time, the Town has no control over proposed changes to existing buildings or the design of new buildings. Although individual residents have initiated the placement of a few buildings on the National Historic Register, this placement protects the buildings only from public development projects which receive federal funds. It does not protect them from state or local development, nor from any alteration by the owner or subsequent owners of the property. Without design standards in the Village, and along Routes 302 and 117, where commercial development is moving out from the Village, there is a strong likelihood that some of Bridgton's character will be diminished by the addition of poorly-designed commercial architecture.