

16. HISTORY

Beginnings

Brewer, Maine, is the hometown of some very famous and important people. It is also the beginning of settler-life along the Penobscot River. From humble beginnings there arose an important and vibrant community that in the 1800's was one of the most important areas in the Northeast United States. Today, the spirit of our forefathers lives on in a City that is successful and energetic.

Well over two hundred years ago a young man, named John Brewer, left his home in Massachusetts and took a small sailing vessel along the coast of Maine to the Penobscot River and the present site of Brewer. He built a dam and sawmill at the mouth of the Segeunkedunk stream and built a small cabin for himself and his family. Other settlers came with him to form the beginnings of a township that would eventually incorporate the area of Brewer, Orrington and Holden. There were a couple of other settlers that had come the year before, but it was Brewer who built the first major colony.

John Brewer and the settlers had just begun to make their town when the Revolutionary War began. The British occupied the area north of the Penobscot River and built a fort at Castine in which to secure this land from the revolutionary colonists. Of course this was very disturbing to the settlers. John Brewer had become a captain in the militia and was the spokesman for the settlers with the British. When the colonists, who were now Americans, sent a large number of ships to take the fort at Castine, it was John Brewer who was able to give the fleet commander information that would have been beneficial to the American cause. Unfortunately the fleet commander did not follow the information and a British fleet intercepted and defeated the Americans. Some of the American ships that were destroyed are still in the waters off of Brewer and part of one has been recently uncovered.

With the defeat of the American fleet and their failure to take the fort, it was John Brewer who aided the wounded and saw to their safety. By then it was becoming increasingly dangerous for Brewer and he took his family back to Massachusetts for the duration of the war. Many other settlers did likewise, but some stayed in their homes and the settlement was maintained.

After the Revolutionary war, John Brewer and many other settlers returned to their homes. A group of them petitioned to have the area incorporated and the area became known as Orrington. It wouldn't be until 1812 that Brewer separated from Orrington and had its own government.

Business and Industry

During the 1800s, Brewer began to grow as a town. The skills of the inhabitants and the natural resources of the area allowed for the development of many important businesses. That combination of individual ability and available resources continues to this day. Until modern times, the river was the major "road" and since the Penobscot River is one of the largest and most powerful rivers in New England, it supported many businesses. Originally the streams emptying into the river allowed for dams which powered the mills; sawmills for creating lumber and grist mills for grinding corn and grains. Later the river itself would have dams, which created power plants, paper mills, and textile mills. Originally, however it was the small streams that were the power source. Also the river paved the way for log drives started in the great north woods and the use of these logs for lumber, shipbuilding and shingle making.

One of the major industries of the Brewer area in the 1800s was shipbuilding. These were the days of the great wooden ships and Brewer was the center for building some of the great wooden sailing ships in America. Great rafts of logs were driven down the river to Brewer, sawed into lumber or made into masts and other spars, then used in building ships in the great boatyards of Brewer. Even when most wooden ships were replaced by steel, Brewer produced some wonderful wooden steamboats. It was the time of lumber barons, famous captains, and the wealth of the area.

Another major industry was ice-harvesting. Very large ice houses were built along the Brewer shore to house the tremendous amounts of ice that could be obtained. During the winter, the river froze over and large blocks of ice were sawed from the river to be moved to the ice houses by ramps. Each company had a section to harvest. In the ice-house the blocks of ice were stored in sawdust to prevent melting until the next spring. Once the river was open, ships could load a cargo of ice blocks and transport them to large cities for ice-boxes. Penobscot River ice harvesting was a major source of refrigeration until the development of the electric refrigerator.

Brewer took advantage of its soil to develop a major industry. Much of the area is clay and clay makes bricks. There was a time when many brick companies produced a product that was shipped all over. It made good ballast for the sailing ships, so that captains could derive an extra source of income from their voyages. Brewer brick making continued well into the twentieth century.

With the decline of the wooden ships and the development of modern refrigeration, the fortunes of the area began to decline. The area which once rivaled Boston was fading. There were still small businesses and industries, but the boom times were over. But Brewer always was able to maintain itself in the world. Eastern Manufacturing produced paper from rags and later from wood pulp and that anchored the City for many years. Recently a new company, Cianbro, has taken over the former site of Eastern Manufacturing and produced metal modules for shipment anywhere in the world.

Famous People

Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain is a true American hero. He was born in 1828 in a small house that still exists along North Main Street. He grew up in a strong family that had both military and religious foundations. During the battle of Gettysburg, Chamberlain's bravery and daring secured the extreme flank of the union army and prevented the confederates from surrounding them. His action probably saved the battle and turned the tide of war. For his gallantry in many of the major battles of the war, he was brevetted to Major General and was chosen to receive the confederate surrender of arms at Appomattox. He was four times governor of the state of Maine and president of Bowdoin College. For years after his death he was all but forgotten. Then Michael Shaara wrote "the Killer Angels" which was the basis of the movie "Gettysburg" and Chamberlain was re-discovered. Today he is recognized as a man of extreme courage and morality. Brewer can be extremely proud of this hero.

Charles Eugene Tefft was born into a well-recognized Brewer family. He was a teen living in the family house on Center Street when he sculptured the bust of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain. He then created a sculpture which came in second in national competition and he received a scholarship to an artisan school in New York. Tefft spent a career creating sculptures that are in major cities around the United States and was recognized as one of America's finest sculptors.

Pages 1 and 2 adapted from Brewer website write-up prepared by David Hanna.

Education – Brewer School over the Years

By 1882, in a time before school buses, there were 11 schoolhouses containing 15 schools in local neighborhoods, plus a free high school at the ferry village (its classes were held at the town hall, then later at the Brimmer Street School).

The advent of buses made it possible for schools to serve broader areas. By the 1960s, Brewer had six schools that served grammar school children; Capri Street School, Pendleton Street School, State Street School (1948), and Washington Street School (1952). There was also the Junior High School on Somerset Street (originally built as the high school in 1926), and the Brewer High School, built in 1958.

With all the schools aging, in 2011 a new school, built to replace all the K-8 schools, opened on the site of the former Pendleton Street School (which had closed due to a mold problem several years before). The new Brewer Community School was designed to echo the history of Brewer, with its various wings designed to reflect five themes: shipbuilding, the river, ice harvesting, brick-making, and papermaking. Hallways use colors and motifs to convey those themes, and historical photos adorn the walls throughout. In 2011, Brewer voters approved a referendum to accept \$5.4 million in interest-free federal funding to renovate the high school.

Adapted from a bicentennial article in the Oct. 12, 2012 edition of The Weekly

Historical and Archaeological Resources

From the earliest times, until the advent of the automobile, settlement in Brewer centered on the Penobscot River. This section provides a brief overview of the major places and structures that have been the backdrop to important events in the lives of those who have lived and toiled along Brewer's waterfront.

Archaeological Sites

There are two types of archaeological sites (Native American, before European arrival), and historic archaeological sites (mostly European-American, after written historic records, about 1600 A.D.). Prehistoric sites include campsites or village locations, rock quarries and workshops (for making stone tools), and petroglyphs or rock carvings.

Prehistoric archaeological sites. Native Americans have lived, camped, hunted and fished along the river at numerous sites and there are many tales of the Penobscots' and Abenakis' exploits in the area. Documented evidence of their settlements, however, is sparse. Most commonly, prehistoric archaeological sites are located within 50 meters of canoe-navigable water, on relatively well-drained, level land. The Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) has identified and mapped the general location of six sites in Brewer. Four are located along the Penobscot River, one is located on Eaton Stream in North Brewer, and one is located away from the river in South Brewer.

Historic archaeological sites. Historic archaeological sites may include cellar holes from houses, foundations for farm buildings, mills, wharves and boat yards, as well as near-shore shipwrecks. MHPC has identified 10 historic archaeological sites, as shown in the table below.

Historic Archaeological Sites in Brewer			
MHPC #	Site	Description	Time Period
ME 054-001	“Rosa Mueller”	American wreck, schooner	July 29, 1090
ME 054-002	Holyoke House well	Anglo-American well, undergr. rr	Late 1820’s?
ME 054-003	Brewer’s Mill	Anglo-American mill, saw mill	1770-early 20 th c.
ME 054-004	Phinney	Unidentified wreck, vessel	Rev. War
ME 054-005	Felts Brook Barn Complex	American farmstead	19 th century
ME 054-006	Brewer Steam Brick Co.	American brickyard, after	1859-1890
ME 054-007	“Ignazio”	American wreck, unidentified	August, 1869
ME 054-008	Aldrich’s saw mill	English mill, saw mill ca.	1823 to 1840-50s
ME 054-009	Rider’s brick yard	English brickyard, ca.	1858-1859
ME 054-0010	Brewer Cove Shipwreck	American wreck, unidentified	Poss. Rev. War

Source: Maine Historic Preservation Commission

The remains of one of the American vessels destroyed in the 1779 Penobscot Expedition has been discovered by Kustom Steel Boatyard’s owner, Brent Phinney, and the site is listed on U.S. Navy mapping as the “Phinney site.” The site is midway between the present “Schooners Restaurant on the Brewer side and the Harbor Master on the Bangor side.

Historic Structures

According to information from the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, there are two structures listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

- Penobscot Salmon Club and Pool, off North Main Street, on the river and
- Daniel Sargent House, at 613 South Main Street.

Based on survey data, the MHPC has identified three additional properties that may also be eligible for listing in the national register:

- House, 508 South Main Street
- House, 596 South Main Street
- Brewer Armory, 133 Elm Street

Brewer Register of Historic Places (updated through March, 2013)

The Brewer Register of Historic Places is a program to increase awareness of Brewer’s history by developing a registry that recognizes houses over 100 years old, residences of historic figures and important historic city sites. The program is a partnership between the City of Brewer and the Brewer Historical Society (a 501 c3 corporation that is not a City entity). This register is open to all Brewer property owners and is a non-regulatory recognition of the value of Brewer’s past history.

The City of Brewer, through the City Council's Historic Resources Advisory Board (created by the City Council in 2008 to work with the Brewer Historical Society), provides a clearinghouse for historic place recognition. The Brewer Historical Society maintains the documentation of the registry.

The program is promoted to the citizens of Brewer as a way to become actively involved in the City's history by displaying a sign on the outside of a qualified property that depicts the homeowner's naming of the house, the date the property was built, a replica of the historic Brewer seal and the Brewer Historical Society designation at the bottom. The owner pays a nominal fee for the sign.

Properties include:

1. 350 North Main Street (birthplace and childhood home of Civil War hero General Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain); early American Cape Cod house, 1 story, built in 1818 and rebuilt using dormers in 1900 into a Gothic Cottage style house.
2. 5 East Summer Street (Fiddlehead Inn); Victorian, 2.5 story house with Queen Anne features, built around 1885
3. 173 Wilson Street (Fannie Hardy Eckstorm house); Classic Revival, mid 19th Century, 1.5 story with many original details still present
4. 199 Wilson Street (Brewer Historical Society Clewley Museum); Classical Revival, built around 1880
5. 60 Parker Street (home and original business premises of Old Footman Dairy); Victorian-Queen Anne, 2.5 story with attached carriage house, built around 1880
6. 57 Parker Street (parsonage of the Methodist Episcopal Church of Brewer from 1873-1922); Early American style, 1.5 story, Cape Cod with door window, built pre-Civil War
7. 7 Howard Street; Federal Revival style, 2.5 story, built around 1870
8. 34 Brimmer Street; Queen Anne, 2.5 story, built in 1907
9. 80 Chamberlain Street (homestead of Joshua L. Chamberlain, Jr.; Classical Revival, 2.5 story, door window lights, fine wooden corners, early turned molding at roof; built around 1835
10. Oak Hill Cemetery; started in 1825
11. North Brewer Cemetery; acquired in 1840
12. Chamberlain Freedom Park; built in 1997
13. 105 Union Street; Classical Revival, 2 story, built around 1870

14. 484 Day Road; New England Farmhouse, homestead started about 1860

Educational Resources

Brewer has made a significant commitment to providing educational resources highlighting its historical cultural heritage. These include several parks which have oral and/or cultural significance including Chamberlain Freedom Park, Indian Trails Park, the Rocks Park (pocket park on the river near the I 395 exit) and the proposed Brewer Historic Waterfront Trail with its conceptual educational stations on the history of the river. Other educational resources include the City's website, the Brewer Historical Society website, and historical displays contained at the Library and the new Community School.

Other Historic Information

The special significance of the river and the resources along its banks is well illustrated in "A Pictorial History of Brewer, Maine," published in 1976. Yet, today there is little to show of this proud history, and none of the old shipyards, brickyards, ice houses, or mill sites can be readily identified. A few notes from that History make the point:

- Between 1849 and 1919, 163 barques, brigs, schooner, sloops and ships were built in shipyards like Barbour's, Charles Cooper & Co., Joseph Oakes & Son, Dunning, and others.
- In 1870, Brewer's 18 brickyards employed 126 "hands" and made over 11.25 million bricks; the brickyards flourished because of the excellent brick clays found near good wharfage on the riverfront. The brick industry thrived from before 1850 until about 1919.
- In 1883, the "Mining and Industrial Journal" reported that there were four very large mills, running on steam, on the waterfront. They noted the existence of a planing and box mill, house finishing mills, brush manufacturers, a molding mill and the Dirigo Steam Mill which manufactured long lumber, clapboards, shingles, lathes, pickets and fish flakings. (As early as 1836, the "Niles Register" reported 200 sawmills within a few miles of Bangor manufacturing 1,500,000 feet of boards daily!).
- Between 1879 and the turn of the century, some 13 ice companies operated huge ice houses on the Penobscot in Brewer. Up to half a million tons were harvested on the Penobscot annually and, at the height of the trade a cargo of 2,000 tons was not infrequent.
- In 1889, the Eastern Manufacturing Company (later Eastern Fine and now Cianbro) was organized for the purpose of building a pulp mill at Sargent Point. Constructed on the site of a number of sawmills, Eastern Manufacturing expanded steadily for the next 30 years under F.W. Ayer's and John Sullivan's leadership.

Analysis

- 1. Evidence of historic patterns of settlement.** Many of the older, smaller lots (many still have the older homes) are located in South Brewer which serviced the mill. North Brewer has the old “river lots”, long narrow parcels running up from the river.
- 2. Protective measures currently existing for historic and archaeological resources and their effectiveness.** The City of Brewer and the Historical Society have established a partnership to administer the Brewer Register of Historic Places, but participation is strictly voluntary.
- 3. Site plan and/or subdivision requirements.** The Land Use Code requires applicants for major projects to contact State agencies for their input on state-identified historic or archaeological sites.
- 4. State of repair of significant historic resources and whether the community can provide preservation incentives.** Properties on the National Register of Historic Places are generally in good condition. The Brewer Register of Historic Places provides an incentive to preserve properties on a voluntary basis by appealing to landowners’ sense of civic pride in the historic importance of their properties.