

## B. HISTORY & CULTURE

The purpose of this section is to:

1. Outline the history of the Town of Machiasport;
2. Identify and profile the historic, archaeological, and cultural resources of Machiasport in terms of their type and significance;
3. Assess current and future threats to the existence and integrity of those resources;
4. Assess the effectiveness of existing measures to protect and preserve those resources. Particular emphasis is placed on preserving historic and cultural resources along the shoreline as coastal development increases.

## FINDINGS

Machiasport is defined by its maritime setting and heritage. On its shores are etched records of early contact of Native Americans and European explorers. In addition, Machias Bay saw the first naval engagement of the American Revolution. Its many miles of coastline (82 miles) provided an abundant herring fishery and continue to provide many points of access for commercial fishermen. Historic farms and a fort are still present as is the Libby Island Lighthouse which continues to guide ships in dangerous waters that cover dozens of shipwrecks.

This chapter documents the status of historic and culture resource in Machiasport. Maritime culture and related resources are particularly prominent in the history and culture of Machiasport. This chapter provides policies for the protection of important historic and cultural resource with a focus on maritime resources.

## BRIEF SUMMARY OF MACHIASPORT'S HISTORY

Machiasport, once part of the town of Machias, attracted the attention of explorers and traders as a valuable port at an early date. Before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth there were French and English trading posts on Cross Island (in neighboring Cutler) as well as Birch Point. Evidence of Native American settlement is also found in Holmes Bay.

Settlement occurred after extensive fires in western Maine in the 1760s forced families to seek out hay and timber lands. Fort O'Brien (see *Map 2: Public Facilities*) was built after the capture of the British ship, "Margaretta". Originally named Fort Machias, Fort O'Brien was upgraded by Massachusetts in 1777 and taken over by Congress in 1781. The Fort was attacked in 1814 by the British and abandoned. It was activated again in 1863 at the height of the Civil War and refortified. It is now a State Park on a prominent earthwork overlooking the Machias River.

Machiasport prospered with an open-water port year round in Bucks Harbor. By 1800 the Port Village included the families of Matthias Tobey, Nathaniel Phinney, Benjamin

Berry, John Sanborn, and William Sanborn. The Larrabees and Pettigrews settled Larrabee’s Cove, the Cobaths and Libbys were in Bucks Harbor and the Bryants and Millers settled Little Kennebec. Bucks Harbor was probably named for Captain Thomas Buck of Plymouth, Massachusetts, who carried the first settlers to Machias in 1763. Machiasport separated from Machias and incorporated as a town in 1826.

An early mill and shipbuilding site is located in the East Kennebec part of Machiasport on land owned in 1817 by William Holloway and now known as the Dodge place. There was another shipyard, known as the Charles Ingalls yard, in what is presently the Otto Kurz boatyard south of The Slip/Gates House. Smoked herring/sardine factories were located in several coves and islands in Machiasport and are no longer present.

The Gates House, built on the slope of a hill on the edge of the Machias River, is on the National Register of Historic Places and was named after Nathan Gates, a trader who brought the house, barn, store and wharves to their current location via the Machiasport-Whitneyville Railroad.

The population of Machiasport peaked in the 1880s, as occurred elsewhere in Washington County, at the height of an economy based on timber, fisheries and shipbuilding. As rail replaced ships as a primary means of transportation corridors of commerce went inland along with many residents of maritime communities.

**Table B-1 MACHIASPORT POPULATION**

Year	Population	Year	Population
2000	1160	1890	1437
1990	1166	1880	1531
1980	1108	1870	1526
1970	870	1860	1502
1960	980	1850	1266
1950	781	1840	834
1940	818	1830	688
1930	851	1820	p/o Machias
1920	1117	1810	p/o Machias
1910	1218	1800	p/o Machias
1900	1218	1790	p/o Machias

Source: US Census

Machiasport retains an indelible feature of the Maine Coast in the now automated (unmanned) Libby Island Lighthouse. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Libby Island Lighthouse is all that remains of a complex of buildings that housed generations of lighthouse keepers families. The record of this historic landmark is beautifully recalled in a 1987 book by former Machiasport resident Philmore B. Wass, *Lighthouse in My Life*<sup>1</sup>. Hervey Wass, Philmore’s father was lighthouse keeper on Libby Island from 1919 to 1940 and the book brings a now gone way of life vividly back.

<sup>1</sup> Philmore B. Wass. 1987. *Lighthouse in my Life – The Story of a Maine Lightkeeper’s Family*. Capital City Press, Montpelier, Vermont.

Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, fisheries change. Clamming, which has been an important economic activity for over century, continues to be important to the local economy. But, lobster has largely replace herring as the dominant commercial species. Historic weirs (last documented in 1990) that were used in the past to catch herring are no longer active. More recent aquaculture has started to play an active role. On the land side, Machiasport once has numerous saltwater farms. Over time, many have been abandoned or gone out of business. But at least four farms currently operate in Machiasport.

### Historic Buildings and Places

The Maine Historic Preservation Commission maintains an inventory of important sites including buildings or sites on the National Registry of Historic Places (NRHP). They record four such listings (three already referenced above) for the town including:

- Fort O'Brien
- The Gates House
- Liberty Hall
- Libby Islands Light Station

**Fort O'Brien** was built after the capture of the British ship “Margaretta” in fear of British retaliation. Originally named Fort Machias, the fort was upgraded and renamed Fort O'Brien by Massachusetts in 1777. The Continental Congress took over control of the structure in 1781. Fort O'Brien suffered no further attacks during the Revolutionary War. It was next returned to active service during the War of 1812. In 1814, Fort O'Brien was captured by 900 British regulars, who removed the fort's guns and burned the barracks. Fort O'Brien once again activated (for a final time) during the Civil War when an entirely new battery was constructed just south of the 18<sup>th</sup> century fortifications. Fort O'Brien, which is now a State Historic Site under the management of the Bureau of Parks and Lands, is also listed as an archaeological site.



Fort O'Brien State Historic Site overlooks Machias Bay & the location of the first naval engagement of the American Revolution.  
Photo: WCCOG

**The Gates House**, “so named, after the 1813 sale of Zebadee Mayhew’s house, barn, store and wharves at public auction to Nathan Gates,” according to the 1994 comprehensive plan. “From the mid-nineteenth century, the wharves were the final stop on the Machiasport-Whitneyville Railroad. The narrow-gauge wooden railed railroad was one of the first in the state. The basement facing the river was always used as a store or

trading port. The house remained in the Gates family until 1929.” The Gates House currently belongs to the Machiasport Historical Society and is open seasonally to the public.

**Liberty (Town) Hall** was designed and built by Andrew R. Gilson of Machias in 1873. This large two-story clapboard structure with a central square tower is an excellent example of the Italianate style of architecture. Liberty Hall was used as the town office for many years. The structure, which had suffered from neglected over the years, is undergoing major renovation funded in part through a Community Development Block



Renovations are underway way to restore Liberty Hall, One of four structures in Machiasport listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Photo: Campaign to Save Liberty Hall

Grant. The Town anticipates that Liberty Hall will once again serve as a community center when the renovations are complete (within two to five years).

**Libby Island Light Station** was ordered built in 1822 by President James Monroe. Located on the Island’s side, it marks the entrance to Machias Bay. A 34’ x 36’ wood frame structure was built in 1824 and improved in 1949. The tower was built in 1848 of granite, in a conical design, a 42’ white beacon that has remained basically unaltered to this day. A number of other outbuildings were also constructed, but none survive. According to old journals at the station there were 35 wrecks from 1856 to 1902. Out of this number only 15 lives were lost owing to the efficient work and valor of the light keepers at the station. The property is currently owned by the US Coast Guard and public access is restricted.

MHPC indicates that a comprehensive survey of Machiasport’s above-ground historic resources needs to be conducted to identify those properties which may be eligible for nomination to the National Register for Historic Places.

#### **Other historic structures**

Locally significant historic buildings and sites located in Machiasport include some late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century homes, a number of homes built by ship captains, two historic schoolhouses (Starboard Schoolhouse and Machiasport School House), and two historic churches. Machiasport’s historic churches, in particular, add definition to the historic pattern of development in Machiasport characterized by multiple small villages and hamlets along the coasts of Machias Bay.

**Machiasport Congregational Church** is a Federal style church built in 1828. The Church is actively used and is in good condition. Many prominent residents of Machiasport are buried in the historic cemetery located next to the Machiasport



Machiasport Congregational Church is one of several locally significant historic churches in Machiasport that define Machiasport's historic villages and hamlets.

Photo: WCCOG

Congregational Church, parts of which are suffering the effects of erosion.

**Larabee Baptist Church** was built between 1874 and 1880. The Church is active and its facilities are in excellent condition.

**Machiasport Baptist Church**, known as “the church across the river,” was located on the East Side of Machiasport. It was built in 1823-4 and was one of the earliest existing churches in the Machias area.

Unfortunately, since the last Comprehensive Plan, the Church has been removed. The site still contains a historic graveyard, the church bell and a plaque marking the church's former

location.

Many historic structures are clustered in the Town's two largest village centers, Buck's Harbor and Machiasport. Based on the cluster of historic buildings and the preserved historic pattern of development typical of a down east, coastal, fishing villages, Machiasport village has preliminarily designated as a “historic district” by the Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC). Designation as a historic district may make the Town eligible for certain historic preservation grants. The Comprehensive Plan Committee recommends that the Town work with the MHPC, the Historic Society and interested property owners to develop a village plan for the district to guide public investment (e.g. roads, lighting) in a manner consistent with the village's historic character and the needs of the community.

In addition to historic buildings, a handful of locations in Machiasport as also noted as places with local historical significance. These include the Veteran's Memorial at the Town Office, Jasper Beach, and the former location of the “Promised Land” yacht club.

### Archeological Sites

According to the Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) there are nineteen known *prehistoric archaeological* sites (Native American, before European arrival) located within Machiasport. They are all petroglyphs (rock carvings) and all located in the coastal zone. Five petroglyph sites are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. MHPC indicates that reconnaissance-level survey in the coastal zone is mostly complete but intensive-level survey and site conservation work is needed at most sites. Exact locations of the petroglyphs are not mapped in order to protect their integrity.

According to Mark Hedden<sup>2</sup>, Machias Bay is located in the approximate center of the historic range of the Passamaquoddy/Malecite groups. His analysis of the petroglyphs in Machiasport reveals:

Three pecked petroglyph representations of seventeenth century European sailing vessels have been recorded among a total of nine Native American petroglyph sites clustered near the upper end of Machias Bay, Maine. The ship representations were executed near the highest utilized surfaces on tide-washed ledges that contain a record of petroglyph activity extending back an estimated 3000 years before present. The ship images are directly associated with traditional native American imagery and show the same manner of execution and the same degree of subsequent erosion and patination as the associated traditional petroglyphs. The architecture of the three single-masted ships matches the known features of small vessels used by the French, English and Dutch mariners of the first third of the seventeenth century. Small vessels of this kind were used by explorers seeking good sites for settlement and fur trading opportunities in shallow harbors along the coasts of New England and the Gulf of Maine.<sup>3</sup>

Fort O'Brien, on the National Register of Historic Places, is also designated as a *historic archeological* site (mostly European-American, after historic written records about 1600 A.D.) as is an American tidal mill. These two sites and an additional 37 shipwrecks are summarized on the following table.

**Table B-2 ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES IN MACHIASPORT**

Site Number	Name	Type
ME257-001	Fort O'Brien	American Fort
ME257-002	Mill	American tidal mill
ME257-003	"Caledonia"	Canadian wreck, schooner
ME257-004	"John C. Myers"	American wreck, barque
ME257-005	"GLENULLEN"	American wreck, schooner
ME257-006	"Laurissa"	Canadian wreck, schooner
ME257-007	"Mabel Purdy"	Canadian wreck, schooner
ME257-008	"Mary J. Elliot"	American wreck, schooner
ME257-009	"Rebecca W. Huddell"	American wreck, schooner
ME257-010	"William Mason"	American wreck, schooner
ME257-011	"Seabird"	American wreck, schooner
ME257-012	"Sedona"	American wreck, schooner
ME257-013	"Shawmut"	American wreck,
ME257-014	"Ximena"	American wreck, schooner
ME257-015	"Edward W. Murdock"	Unidentified wreck
ME257-016	"Scio"	American wreck, schooner
ME257-017	"John L. Bowman"	American wreck, schooner
ME257-018	"Princeport"	Canadian wreck, schooner
ME257-019	"Ella G. Ellis"	American? wreck, schooner

<sup>2</sup> Hedden, Mark H. 1996 3,500 Years of Shamanism in Maine Rock Art. In *Rock Art of the Eastern Woodlands*. American Rock Art Research Association. Occasional Paper 2.

<sup>3</sup> Hedden, Mark H. 2002 Contact Period Petroglyphs in Machias Bay, Maine In *Archeology of Eastern North America* 30:1-20

Site Number	Name	Type
ME257-020	“F. C. Lockhart”	American? wreck, schooner
ME257-021	“Africa”	Canadian wreck, barkentine
ME257-022	“Badjr”	American wreck, oil screw
ME257-023	“Samuel B. Jones”	American wreck, steam screw
ME257-024	“Florence”	British wreck, barque
ME257-025	“D.M. Monroe”	American wreck, cargo vessel
ME257-026	“Clearmont”	British wreck, barque
ME257-027	“Fame”	British wreck
ME257-028	“Eliza Hatfield”	Canadian wreck, schooner
ME257-029	“Emma G.”	Canadian wreck, schooner
ME257-030	“Julia Ellen”	Canadian wreck, schooner
ME257-031	“Lizzie B.”	Canadian wreck, schooner
ME257-032	“Lyra”	Canadian wreck, schooner
ME257-033	“Mary E.”	Canadian wreck, schooner
ME257-034	“Merlin”	Canadian wreck, schooner
ME257-035	“Nellie King”	Canadian wreck, schooner
ME257-036	“Phoenix”	Canadian wreck, schooner
ME257-037	“Playfair”	Canadian wreck, schooner
ME257-038	“Rowena”	Canadian wreck, schooner

Source: Maine Historic Preservation Commission

The MHPC indicates that no professional comprehensive survey for historic archeological sites has been conducted to date in Machiasport and that future field work could focus on agricultural, residential and industrial sites relating to the earliest Euro-American settlement of the town beginning in the late 1760s.

### **Cemeteries**

The cemeteries of Machiasport provide insight into the history of the community. A number of major cemeteries (mostly on private property) are known to the town and appear on USGS maps. These include Hillside Cemetery, Bayview Cemetery, Church Hill Cemetery, Palmer Cemetery and Stuart Hill Cemetery (see *Map 2: Public Facilities*).

In addition, there are numerous additional small cemeteries and burial sites located through the community, many of which are in need of attention. However, cemeteries in Machiasport have not been comprehensively documented. The Town should work with the Historical Society, property owners and interested citizens to create a comprehensive inventory of cemeteries in Machiasport; and develop a plan to insure that cemeteries are adequately maintained.

### **Preservation of Historic and Archaeological Sites**

Machiasport does not currently have any regulatory measures in place to preserve historic and archaeological sites in the community. As noted above, many of the community’s most prominent historic sites are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. A significant number of archaeological sites (mostly including petroglyphs) are held in conservation. In addition, the Town of Machiasport is actively supporting historic restoration of Liberty Hall; and this plan recommends that the Town continue to pursue designation of Machiasport village as a historic district.

To date, these efforts have been sufficient. In addition, protection this plan recommends completing a professional survey of potential areas of historical and archaeological significance as funding allows. Once a survey has been completed, the presence of and historical and archaeological sites and artifacts should be considered when development is proposed and significant archaeological sites within the shoreland zone should be zoned for Resource Protection.

**FINDINGS OF PREVIOUS COMPREHENSIVE PLAN & EXISTING POLICIES**

Relative to historical and archaeological resources, the Comprehensive Plan adopted by the Town of Machiasport in 1996 found that, while Machiasport has a long documented history, historic and archaeological resources in the Town had not been fully inventoried. The Plan identified a number of properties that should be assessed in terms of their historical significance and found broad public support for historic preservation. Based on these findings, the Comprehensive Plan establish as municipal goal: “to identify and protect Machiasport’s historic and archaeological resources.”

In order to achieve this goal, the 1996 Comprehensive Plan made policy recommendations as summarized in the table below along with notes on the status of the policy recommendations. A complete list of the policy recommendation from the previous Comprehensive Plan is included in *Appendix B: Executive Summary of the Town of Machiasport Comprehensive Plan, 1996*. A full copy of the previous plan is on file in the Town Office.

**Table B-3 POLICIES & STRATEGIES RELATED TO HISTORICAL RESOURCES FROM THE 1996 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

<b>Policies</b>	<b>Notes</b>
The Town of Machiasport will promote the identification and subsequent protection of significant historic archaeological resources through voluntary registration and protection programs.	<i>This policy continues to align with municipal goals and should be continued.</i>
The Town will adopt regulations that protect identified significant historic archaeological resources from incompatible development.	<i>This policy continues to align with municipal goals and should be continued.</i>
<b>Implementation Strategies</b>	<b>Notes</b>
The Inventory of historic buildings in Town (Action Plan, 1989) for all parts of town will be updated.	<i>This strategy has not been implemented.</i>
The Town will actively seek the assistance of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission in conducting a comprehensive survey of the town’s historic above-ground resources in order to identify other properties that may be eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.	<i>This strategy has not been implemented.</i>

Policies and implementation strategies to protect historic and cultural in Machiasport are presented on the next page. They included revisions as noted above, along with additional policies and strategies that reflect changes in conditions on the ground, local priorities and State and Federal policy since the previous Comprehensive Plan was adopted.

**POLICIES AND IMPLEMENTATION**

In order to preserve the historic and cultural resources within the town of Machiasport, the Town has developed the following policies and implementation strategies:

<b>Goal: Machiasport will preserve the cultural, historic and archeological resources of its maritime heritage for future generations.</b>			
<b>Policy</b>	<b>Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
Promote the identification and subsequent protection of significant historic archaeological resources through voluntary registration and protection programs.	Promote awareness of historic structures and artifacts including the consideration of listing on the National Register of Historic Places. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Examine nomination of Starboard Community/School House to the national Register</li> </ul>	Historical Society	Immediate
	Complete comprehensive inventories of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prehistoric archaeological resources.</li> <li>▪ Historic archaeological resources.</li> <li>▪ Historical resources.</li> </ul>	Historical Society; ad-hoc committee	Short Term 2-5 years
	Take advantage of any outside sources of funding for professionally conducted inventories (i.e. State Planning money, Maine Historic Preservation Commission Certified Local Government Program and survey grants).	Historical Society; Select Board	On-going
	Finalize designation of Machiasport village as a Historic District; and develop a village plan to guide public investment in manner that supports the village’s historic qualities.	Historical Society; Planning Board.	As funding allows
	Create a comprehensive inventory of cemeteries in Machiasport; and develop a plan to insure that cemeteries are adequately maintained.	Historical Society; Selectmen	As funding allows
	Work in cooperation with the State of Maine concerning any of the identified historical and archaeological resources within Machiasport.	Planning Board; Select Board	As funding allows
Ensure that archeological and historic sites are not unknowingly destroyed.	Potential areas and artifacts of historical and archaeological significance, especially along the coast, should be professionally surveyed and documented. The presence of and historical and archaeological sites and artifacts should be considered when development is proposed.	Planning Board; Historical Society	Short Term (2-5 years) and as funding allows
Adopt regulations that protect identified significant historic archaeological resources from incompatible development.	Zone significant archaeological sites that occur within the Shoreland Zone, such as the petroglyphs, as Resource Protection.	Planning Board; Select Board	Immediate