

B. HISTORIC AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

The purpose of this section is to:

1. Outline the history of the town of Whitneyville;
2. Identify and profile the historic and archaeological resources present in Whitneyville in terms of their type and significance;
3. Assess current and future threats to the existence and integrity of those resources; and
4. Assess the effectiveness of existing measures to protect those resources.

FINDINGS

Whitneyville's history is closely tied to its natural resources and its location on the Machias River. For a hundred years beginning in the mid-19th century, Whitneyville was a small but prosperous mill town. Local lumber mills profited from the availability of hydro-power and annual river drives – the last of which occurred in 1972. Although the historical and archaeological resources of Whitneyville have not been fully surveyed, they include several Native American sites; and numerous historical structures concentrated in the village.

Prehistory

Near the end of the last ice age, the present location of the town of Whitneyville lay beneath the submerged edge of a retreating ice sheet. Moraines – or ridges of till, sand and gravel formed along the ice sheet's edge – are visible features of the landscape. In particular, the section of Route 1 in the southern part of Whitneyville sits on a prominent moraine that formed in shallow marine water as part of the Pineo Ridge Moraine system (Borns, 2006).

Early settlement

The first residents of eastern Maine were ancestors of the Passamaquoddy who moved into the areas 6,000 to 10,000 years ago following the retreat of the ice sheet. Early residents almost certainly lived near the present site of Whitneyville along the Machias River, which served as a major transportation route and had abundant fish runs.

Samuel Champlain was among the first Europeans to visit the Machias Valley in the 1600's. Significant European settlement, though, did not occur in the area until the middle of the 18th century. Early European residents made their living fishing, farming, and harvesting lumber along the Machias River. At the time of the American Revolution and during the first years of the Republic, the area that is now Whitneyville was part of the town of Machias.

Incorporation & Construction of the Railroad

Whitneyville incorporated as a town in 1845. The community is named in honor of Colonel Joseph Whitney, an entrepreneur who built a dam across the main course of the river in Whitneyville and erected saw mills to take advantage of the annual lumber drives that carried lumber down the Machias River each spring.

In 1839 John Palmer and Cornelius Sullivan built a narrow gauge railroad to carry lumber products from Whitneyville to the port in Machiasport. This was only the second railroad built in the state of Maine. "The Pheonix", the first steam locomotive used on this line, was shipped to Whitneyville from Boston. A second locomotive, "The Lion," was purchased three years later.

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Currently housed at the Maine State Museum in Augusta, it is one of the earliest extant steam locomotives in America.

Mill Town

Whitneyville's population peaked in 1860 at 579 residents. However, the town continued as a prosperous mill town through the first half of the 20th century. A new school house – currently the Whitneyville Library – was built in 1868 to replace an earlier schoolhouse that had been destroyed by fire. The Whitneyville Congregational Church was constructed in 1869 and 1870. At the time, Whitneyville had 2 churches, a post office, a library, a school house, town hall, and a general store. Many older residents recall the distinctive sound made by walking on the wooden sidewalks that once lined Main Street.

The Washington County Railroad (later the Calais Branch) connected Whitneyville by rail to Calais and Bangor in 1898. Passenger service continued until 1957; and freight service until 1984.

End of the River Drives

Whitneyville's population hit an all time low of 155 residents in 1970. The last river drive occurred the following year in 1971. New EPA-regulations prohibited logs being run down the river. With the increased cost of transporting logs overland, the era of lumber mills in Whitneyville came to an end.

Recent History

Whitneyville's population has remained stable at around 250 people since 1980. The 1980's saw the closure of Whitneyville's grade school, which now serves as the Hillgrove Community Center. Timber harvests continue to play a role in the local economy, but most residents now find work in the neighboring community of Machias, where many services are located.

References:

Town of Whitneyville Comprehensive Plan, 1980.

Borns, Harold, et al. 2006. "Maine's Ice Age Trail Down East: Map and Guide." University of Maine and the National Science Foundation.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Prehistoric archaeological sites include all sites that contain artifacts from before the first written records. In Whitneyville, these included all sites prior to the mid-1700s. All prehistoric archaeological sites in Whitneyville are associated with Native American communities that lived in the area prior to European settlement. The Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) notes that "prehistoric sites include camp or village locations, rock quarries, and work shops, and petroglyphs or rock carvings."

As of March 2011, only one prehistoric archaeological site in Whitneyville has been identified (along the Machias River, upstream from the Canal Road boat launch). According to MHPC

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limited professional archaeological surveys have been conducted along Route 1 in Whitneyville. MHPC recommends that further survey work occur along the banks of the Machias River.

Historic Archaeological Sites

Historic archaeological sites are sites that include significant archaeological artifacts from the time period after written records began. According to MHPC, historic archaeological sites “may include cellar holes from houses, foundations for farm buildings, mills, wharves and boat yards, as well as shipwrecks.”

There are currently no identified historic archaeological sites known in Whitneyville.

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. There is currently only one structure in Whitneyville listed on the National Register: Whitneyville Congregational Church. The Church was constructed by William Bowker in 1869 and 1870. The church’s congregation maintains the historic structure.

A second structure of local historic significance is the former Whitneyville School House, now the Whitneyville Public Library. The two-and-one-half story structure was built in a Greek Revival-style in 1868. A bell was added later the same year. The building was designated as a free library in 1966. Due to exterior renovations, the structure is not eligible for listing on the national Register of Historic Places.

Historic Patterns of Development

Historic patterns of development provide important information about the development of communities and community life. In Whitneyville, the village center with its concentration of 19th century homes contributes to the feel of the community and its sense of place.

Whitneyville is fortunate to have a significant number of historic homes located in the village. Although the mill buildings no longer remain, the historical pattern of residential development is clearly evident.

Preservation of Historic & Archaeological Resources in Whitneyville

The primary mechanisms for historical preservation in Whitneyville are public investment in historic properties and municipal support of privately-led historic preservation efforts. Whitneyville has an active Historical Society and the town has undertaken efforts to preserve its historic schoolhouse, which currently houses the Whitneyville Public Library. The town is also supportive of efforts to maintain the historic Whitneyville Congregational Church.

Nevertheless, a number of historic properties have fallen into disrepair or been destroyed since 1980. Most notably affected are historic properties related to Whitneyville lumber industry, which have all but disappeared. Whitneyville’s original Town Hall was also destroyed nearly 20 years ago.

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The town should continue to promote historic preservation by working with interested property owners to pursue voluntary listing of additional property on the National Register of Historic Place, supporting private efforts to preserve historic properties, and making critical public investments in historical preservation, as necessary.

The town should also amend its subdivision ordinances to ensure that historical and archaeological resources are not inadvertently lost. Land use provisions that would accomplish this goal include a requirement for subdivision or non-residential property developers to look for and identify any historical and archaeological resources, and to take appropriate measures to protect those resources, including but not limited to, modification of proposed site design, construction timing, and/or extent of excavation.

RECOMMENDED POLICIES & STRATEGIES

Given the importance of preserving Whitneyville’s historic and archaeological resources for the benefit of future generations, the town has developed the following policies and implementation strategies.

Goal: Whitneyville will preserve its cultural, historic and archeological resources for future generations.			
Policy	Implementation Strategy	Responsibility	Timeframe
Whitneyville will protect to the greatest extent practicable the significant historic and archaeological resources in the community.	For sites with identified potential for historical and archeological resources, require subdivision or non-residential property developers to look for and identify any historical and archaeological resources, and to take appropriate measures to protect those resources, including but not limited to, modification of proposed site design, construction timing, and/or extent of excavation.	Selectmen; Planning Board	Short-term (1-3 years)
	Amend the town’s land use ordinance to require that the planning board incorporate maps and information provided by the Maine Historic Preservation Commission into their review process.	Selectmen; Planning Board	Short-term (1-3 years)
	Work with the Whitneyville Historical Society and the Maine Historic Preservation Commission to assess the need for, and if necessary plan for, a comprehensive community survey of the community’s historic and archaeological resources.	Selectmen; Planning Board	Medium Term (3-5 years)