

9/30/2020 Architectural Survey Report

Bowdoinham Reconnaissance-Level Survey 2020 Bowdoinham, ME

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Level: Reconnaissance

Name of Surveyors: Margaret Gaertner

Continuing Project?: No

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project surveyed 116 acres in Bowdoinham, Maine at a reconnaissance level. The field survey and photography work were completed in June and early July, 2020 and the supporting documents were prepared in July and August, 2020.

Most of the surveyed properties were residences and several had attached barns. Two telephone equipment buildings were also surveyed. Most of the structures date to the mid- and late-nineteenth century. At the intersection of Main Street and Fisher Road/Post Road a cluster of post-World War II housing was found.

This survey identified one property already listed in the National Register, the Cornish House at 87 Main Street. The survey project also identified three properties eligible for individual listing: the 1893 Captain Getchell House at 61 Main Street; the ca. 1787 Henry Fisher House at 68 Main Street and the ca. 1835 Captain Benjamin Adams House at 127 Main Street. The survey work also identified a potential National Register District.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN AND BACKGROUND RESEARCH

- A. Basis:** This project was initiated by the Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) in early April, 2020. Limited areas of Bowdoinham, ME had been surveyed in 2011. MHPC wished to have additional areas adjacent to the earlier survey project surveyed and evaluated to document the historic resources, determine if additional significant historic resources existed, and if the boundaries of a previously identified potential historic district should be extended.

This survey project was financed in part by Federal funds from the National Park Service, Department of the Interior. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Department of the Interior, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Department of the Interior. The Maine Historic Preservation Commission receives Federal financial assistance for the identification and protection of historic properties. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, or handicap in its federally assisted program.

The views and conclusions contained in this document are those of the author and should not be interpreted as representing the opinions or policies of the U.S. Government. Mention of trade names or commercial products does not constitute their endorsement by the U.S. Government.

- B. Survey and Research Goals:** The goal of this survey project is to survey, record, and evaluate approximately fifty historic buildings in Bowdoinham, Maine. The surveyed buildings are adjacent to historic resources surveyed by the Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) in Bowdoinham in 2011.

Some of the previously surveyed resources were found to be potentially eligible for listing as a National Register Historic District. The earlier project did not include a Project Matrix or Survey Report. One goal of this project is to identify properties that should be added to that potential National Register Historic District.

- C. Survey Boundaries:** The survey project area was defined by MHPC and is shown on a map titled "Bowdoinham Survey Area" dated April 16, 2020. The survey area includes: all of Spring Street except two houses at the east end that face Back Hill Street; all of School Street; Main Street (Route 125), beginning at its intersection with Back Hill Street and extending westward just beyond its intersection with Post Road (Route 138) and Fisher Road. Also included was the middle portion of Back Hill Street – the houses at the intersections of Back Hill Street with Spring and Main Streets were previously surveyed and not included with this project.

D. Survey Methodology:

1. Background research: A list of addresses from the Bowdoinham assessor and imagery from Google maps were used to create a list of properties to be surveyed and identify which properties likely had barns and/or free-standing garages that would require separate survey forms.

Initially due to the COVID-19 virus and later due to building repairs, the Maine State Library was inaccessible for the duration of the project. Due to Covid-19 in-person archival research was not possible at the Maine Historical Society until August. The Bowdoinham historical Society was also closed due to the virus, however Elizabeth Steen, Treasurer of the Bowdoinham Historical Society, provided information about the buildings in the survey area via email communication.

2. Field research: Field research included digital photography and note taking on printed survey forms. Many residents asked about the survey and willingly provided information about their own and other houses, including construction dates and alteration dates, such as the addition of a porch.

3. File search: A file search was not undertaken at MHPC. MHPC provided copies of the survey report, maps, and correspondence for the survey work completed in 2011. Individual forms for previously surveyed and recorded properties were reviewed via CARMA.

E. Goals: The survey project area initially included 116.37 acres. It was expected that approximately fifty survey forms would be completed and entered into CARMA.

III. SURVEY FINDINGS

A. Acres:

The survey area included 116.37 acres. During the survey work, two properties – 74 Main Street and 28 Spring Street - were not visible from the public-right-of way. Interviews with neighbors indicate these two properties are recently constructed residences.

74 Main Street This property is at the top of a hill behind 76 Main Street. The building is heavily screened by trees.

28 Spring Street The west end of Spring Street, beyond its intersection with School Street, is a private road. No buildings were visible from the public right-of-way.

B. Setting: The surveyed area has a rural village setting along Back Hill, Spring, and School Streets. All but two of the buildings were built for residential use and remain single- or two-family houses. The earliest houses date to approximately 1800 and additional houses have been constructed more-or-less continuously through the present day. Most of the buildings date to the mid-19th and mid-20th centuries. All of these buildings are freestanding and some have attached barns. The only non-residential structures surveyed are two former telephone equipment buildings on Main Street and Back Hill Street.

Over time, trees have grown and this part of the village is now heavily shaded. Spring Street is relatively flat, School Steep slopes downhill towards the south, and Back Hill Street slopes steeply down towards the Cathance River. Most of the houses along Back Hill Street are oriented with the primary (entrance) facade facing towards the river below, rather than the street.

The east end of Main Street is a continuation of the village setting just described. As one moves away from the village core, westward along Main Street, the setting becomes more rural. More recent, post-WWII houses are interspersed between the earlier, 19th century houses. Topography along Main Street is generally flat.

C. Number of Resources Recorded: Fifty-two resources were surveyed, photographed, and entered into CARMA. None were previously recorded.

D. Previously Inventoried Properties: None of the properties in this survey have been previously surveyed. This survey project augments rather than repeats or updates previous survey work in Bowdoinham.

E. Types of Properties:

1. Summarize Most (thirty-five) of the surveyed properties were residences. Seven were barns, and all of the barns were attached. Seven of the surveyed buildings were free-standing garages. Two of the surveyed properties were telephone equipment buildings. One property – 160 Main Street – is a late-20th century mixed-use building with a commercial printing business and a residence.

The setting is a village of small lots along School and Spring Streets. The village setting continues along Main Street until just after the bend in the road at 87 Main Street. 94, 98, 99 and 101 Main Street maintain relatively close spacing, and after that the 19th-century houses are spaced further apart.

The houses on the south side of Spring Street date to the mid-20th century. The west end of Main Street has some 19th-century houses that were once farms of varying scales including 116 Main Street, 6 Post Road, and 161 Main Street. In between this properties are more recent, post-World War II residences including 107 Main Street, 120 Main Street, 128 through 142 Main Street, and 2 Fisher Road.

F. National Register Eligibility:

1. The following property is within the survey project area in Bowdoinham and is already individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Cornish House

87 Main Street

The National Register nomination was written in 1979 and recognized the house and carriage house for their architectural significance. The nomination noted the name of the architect, George Curtis of Bowdoin, and architectural features including the elaborately bracketed cornices, three-sided bay window, and gabled lintels with miniature bargeboards over the windows. The Period of Significance was 1800-1899. The free-standing garage was not mentioned in the nomination. Today the property is very well-maintained and retains all aspects of its integrity.

2. During this survey project, three properties were identified as individually eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places:

The Captain Benjamin Adams House (ca. 1835) The house at 127 Main Street is a side-hall plan Greek Revival house with an ell and connected carriage house. The main house retains many original features including a Greek Revival door surround and historic sash. The original builder, Captain Adams (1809-1866) was a noted Bowdoinham sea captain and also a shipbuilder and owner. He was captain of the Bowdoinham ship the *Lavinia Adams*. In 1839 he built the 230-ton brig *Rowland* and in 1844 a 246-ton bark called the *Benjamin Adams*. In 1848 he built a 249-ton bark, the *John H. Millay*, at Cathance Landing, Bowdoinham. He is believed to have been lost at sea on the *Benjamin Adams*.¹

His eldest son, also Captain Benjamin Adams (1842 - 1939), also lived at 127 Main Street and was also a sea captain. He captained the *Reuce*, the *Theobald*, and was the first captain of the *Sea King*, the largest ship built in Bowdoinham. The house, ell, and connected barn are significant both for their architecture (Criterion C) and for their association with the two Captain Adams and Bowdoinham's shipbuilding and maritime history (Criterion B: Development). The house has modern siding and a metal roof but retains its integrity of location, design, setting, feeling, and association. The Period of Significance would be ca. 1835, when the house was built, until 1939, when the younger Captain Adams died.

The Henry Fisher House (ca. 1787) The Henry Fisher House at 68 Main Street is a simple and very well-preserved Federal house with original clapboard siding, 12/12 and 12/9 windows, and an entrance with sidelights and louvered fan at the transom. Especially notable is the early decorative stencil work in the first floor hall. The house is significant for its architecture (Criterion C) as a well-preserved example of a Federal house with a high degree of historic integrity. Additional research into Henry Fisher² and other owners may identify additional areas of significance. The house maintains all aspects of its historic integrity. The Period of Significance would be ca. 1787, when the house was built, through 1865, when Henry Fisher died. The Period of Significance may be extended after additional research is completed.

The Captain George Getchell House (1893) 61 Main Street was built in 1893 by Captain George Getchell, one of the captains of the *Sea King*, the largest ship built in Bowdoinham. The house is an excellent and well-preserved example of Queen Anne architecture and includes many of the features that define the style including a complex roofline with a turret, contrasting siding materials, stained glass windows, and multiple porches with elaborate millwork. The house is significant both for its architecture (Criterion C) and for its association with Getchell and Bowdoinham's shipbuilding and maritime history (Criterion B: Development). All aspects of integrity remain intact, although the setting is slightly compromised as Main Street is much more heavily used than when the house was built. The Period of Significance would be ca. 1893, when the house was built, through 1970, or fifty years ago today.

The survey work also identified a potential National Register District. This District would be a continuation of/expand a District previously identified in 2011. The previous District contained residences and commercial buildings along Main Street, a school building, and churches. This District identified in this survey will add additional resources, primarily houses, to the earlier district.

The District should include: all of the surveyed buildings on both sides of Back Hill Street, including the brick telephone equipment building; 21 School Street; the buildings on the north side of Spring Street;

¹ Lists of ships, builders, owners and captains can be found in *A Maritime History of Bath, Maine and the Kennebec River Region*. Lists of ships built in Bowdoinham can be found in Silas Adams'

² Silas Adams noted a Henry Fisher as the builder of several ships in Bowdoinham (Adams, 114).

and the buildings on both sides of Main Street from 61 Main Street to 115 Main Street on the north side and 68 Main Street to 98 Main Street on the south side. This part of Main Street has 19th century residences and the village setting that defines the rest of the District; as one continues further out Main Street the character changes. The setting becomes more rural and one finds many post-World War II houses between the former farm houses.

Non-contributing buildings in the proposed District are 13 Spring Street and 69 Main Street. Both are recently constructed houses. Photographs of these two properties are included on the following page. After that, please find some representative views of streetscapes in the proposed district. The Period of Significance would be ca. 1762, when Bowdoinham was incorporated, through 1970, or fifty years ago today.



13 Spring Street. June 2, 2020.



69 Main Street. June 2, 2020.



Looking north, up Back Hill Street. 4 Back Hill Street is visible on the right. July 22, 2020.



Looking east on Spring Street. 17 Spring is visible in the foreground, on the left. July 22, 2020.



Looking west on Main Street from the intersection with School Street. July 22, 2020.



Looking northwest on Main Street from the bend near 87 Main Street. The mailboxes on the left side of the road are for 94 and 98 Main Streets. July 22, 2020.

G. Threats: Threats include insensitive remodeling work and deterioration caused by deferred maintenance. Many houses have modern vinyl or aluminum siding over the original siding, which hides only the early siding but also decorative details such as pilasters and window trim, and vinyl replacement windows.

5 Spring Street has been vacant for some time. The roof failed, and the tarps installed over the dormers have disintegrated, allowing water to enter the upper story.

H. Recommendations for Further Work: Additional research is needed into early owners and residents of the houses along Back Hill and sections of Main Street. Deed research will help connect these houses to the owners mentioned in Silas' Adams *The History of the Town of Bowdoinham, 1762-1912*.

Additional work is also needed to place the previously surveyed properties (2011) into a context study and develop additional relevant contexts, such as Bowdoinham's retail history, which is represented by buildings on Main Street. Bowdoinham suffered a disastrous fire in 1902 and second fire in 1904. The fires did not affect the area surveyed in this project but did have a severe impact on Bowdoinham's commercial buildings on Main Street.

I. Data Repository For this Reconnaissance-Level Architectural Survey of Bowdoinham, Maine, the surveys and photographs have been entered into CARMA, where the public can access them via the internet. Hardcopies of the survey forms will be provided to MHPC. CDs with all of the photographs, the survey maps, the Index to Photographs, the Project Matrix, and this Survey Report have been provided to MHPC.

IV. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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V. HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT

The area surveyed represents Bowdoinham's growth and development into a self-contained village during the 19th century. The surviving houses, churches, and school buildings represent the economic prosperity created by shipbuilding, manufacturing and farming in the Town.

The town of Bowdoinham, Maine lies on the west bank of the Kennebec River and the shores of Merrymeeting Bay. Other major waterways in the Town are the Cathance River and the Denham Stream, which meet at Bowdoinham Village (formerly Cathance Landing) and then flow into the Bay, and the Abagadasset River. Bowdoinham is bounded to the east by the Kennebec River, to the southeast by Merrymeeting Bay, to the south by Topsham, to the west by Bowdoin and to the north by Richmond. Bowdoinham is in Sagadahoc County.

Modern-day Bowdoinham was part of a large tract of land granted to the Plymouth Trading Company in 1623. The earliest settlements were short-lived and Bowdoinham is generally considered to have been settled by Europeans in 1725 when the first permanent settlements were built along the shores of the Abagadasset River and Merrymeeting Bay. In 1762, the residents were unhappy with the taxes and other policies of the Plymouth Company and they petitioned Massachusetts for the right of incorporation. The bill was passed by the Governor's Council on September 14, 1762, by the House of Representatives on September 18, and was then signed by the Governor on that same date. Thus, 1762 is the year in which the Town of Bowdoinham was established.

The town of Bowdoinham originally included all the land between the existing Topsham town line and a line between the present-day towns of Richmond and Gardiner. Bowdoin was incorporated as a separate town in 1788 and Cathance Neck joined Topsham in 1787 or 1789.³ Richmond was incorporated in 1823 and Cathance Neck returned to Bowdoinham in 1830, at which point the extents of Bowdoinham were more or less where they are today.⁴

³ *Bowdoinham, 1762-2012: The Bay, The Land, The People*, 3.

⁴ *Bowdoinham, 1762-2012: The Bay, The Land, The People*, 4.

Like other towns in Maine, Bowdoinham saw steady population growth through the end of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1790, the population was 455, in 1800 it reached 792, and 1,412 people in 1810. The numbers leveled out by the middle of the nineteenth century, with 2,402 and 2,382 residents in 1840 and 1850, respectively. After the Civil War, the population dropped, as it did across the rest of the state. In 1870 Bowdoinham had 1,804 residents and by 1880 the population was down to 1,681.⁵ The low point was 915 residents in 1940.

After its incorporation Bowdoinham established schools, churches, and a post office. The first school in Bowdoinham was organized in 1774, twelve years after the incorporation of the town. In 1791, the first school districts – three total – were established.⁶ In 1894, a primary school was built at the corner of Spring and School Streets. It later became a fire house and was eventually demolished in the 1960s. Further up School Street is the former Coombs School, built in 1911 for the high, intermediate and grammar school students in the Town. It is now used as the Town Hall.

Early church services were held in private homes until a shared meeting house was built in 1823. As the various congregations grew in membership, they built their own buildings. The first were the Baptists in 1837 followed by the Methodists in 1849.⁷ In 1880 or 1884, the former “Union” Church was repurposed as the town hall. The building remains today on School Street, near the former Coombs School. At the corner of School and Main is the ca. 1890 former Universalist Church, now the Nazarene Church.⁸

Bowdoinham’s economy included shipbuilding, manufacturing, and farming. Shipbuilding was a major industry in Bowdoinham for nearly 150 years. Between 1768 and 1912, at least 195 ships were built in Bowdoinham. The first ship built in Bowdoinham was the *Merrymeeting*, built by John Patten in 1768. The Patten family built at least twelve ships in the thirty years they lived in Bowdoinham. They then relocated to Bath where they continued to build ships. The Harward yard built at least thirty-two ships between 1817 and 1869.⁹ Other shipbuilders included the Purinton Company, the Given Brothers, D. C. Magoun & Co., and John P. Rideout.

At its peak in the 1850s, Bowdoinham lead the state of Maine in building wooden ships. In 1854, Bowdoinham’s shipyards outproduced even Bath’s, sending 50,295 tons down its ways while Bath produced only 40,000 tons. In third place was Rockland, with only 15,000 tons built.¹⁰ The largest ship built in Bowdoinham was the *Sea King*, in 1877, and the last ship was the *Emma F.* in 1912. The wealth generated both by the shipbuilding work and by the trade it generated – many of the shipbuilders were also captains, owners or part owners in the ships – are evident in Bowdoinham today, represented by the fine houses built by ship captains including the Captain George Getchell house at 61 Main and the Benjamin Adams House at 127 Main Street. Both Getchell and the younger Benjamin Adams served as captain of the *Sea King*.

⁵ George S. Varney, *Gazeteer of Maine*, np. Silas Adams, 219-220.

⁶ Bowdoinham Bicentennial Committee, *Bowdoinham the Seventeenth Town in Maine, 1762-1962*, 8, 13.

⁷ Bowdoinham Bicentennial Committee, 7.

⁸ Both church buildings were identified as contributing structures to a National Register Historic District in the 2011 survey.

⁹ Robert Cummins, “Shipbuilding in Bowdoinham,” np. The Harward Family Home on Pork Point Road in Bowdoinham is already individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

¹⁰ Robert Cummins, “Shipbuilding in Bowdoinham,” np.

In addition to the wages and capital generated by the actual shipbuilding work, the ships also provided a way for Bowdoinham's farm and manufactured products to reach cities along the east coast. Other notable industries in Bowdoinham were saw mills, a kindling factory, a plaster mill, ice cutting, clothing manufacturing, and a large fertilizer manufacturer.

The first saw mill in Bowdoinham was a steam-powered mill built in 1837 on the Cathance River. It operated until 1843 and then ran intermittently until it was demolished in 1862. In 1866, a new saw mill was built, followed shortly by a kindling factory.¹¹ In 1881, Varney noted the town then had three saw mills.¹² Products from the mills were shipped to markets first on ships traveling the Cathance River to the Bay and then the Atlantic Ocean beyond, and later by the railroad.¹³

The rivers were also a source for ice, another important product in nineteenth-century Bowdoinham. Ice harvesting reached its peak in the 1880s, and at one point Bowdoinham had twenty-four ice houses.¹⁴ The widespread use of eclectic-powered refrigerators quickly made ice harvesting obsolete.

Another major manufacturer in Bowdoinham was the Sagadahoc Fertilizer Co., launched in 1880 by William B. and Edward P. Kendall. They used a family-owned mill that previously had produced plaster, grain, and shingles.¹⁵ Their "Dirigo" fertilizer was very successful and a siding to the Maine Central Railroad line allowed the product to be shipped in quantity. The company eventually offered ten different fertilizers and in the early 1900s employed over 100 people.¹⁶ As Bowdoinham's population had dropped to 1,385 people by 1910, this was a significant number.

Beyond the village center were farms that were also important to Bowdoinham's growth and economy. Dairy cows, sheep, chickens, hay and vegetables were all raised for market.¹⁷ At one time Bowdoinham was home to the largest sheep farm in New England, W. B. Kendall's Long Branch Sheep Farm.¹⁸ Houses and barns near the intersections of Fisher Road/Post Road and Main Street including 6 Post Road, 116 Main Street and 160 Main Street represent the productive farms that were once a vital part of Bowdoinham's economy.

¹¹ Bicentennial Historical Booklet Committee, 38.

¹² Varney, *A Gazetteer of the State of Maine*, 125.

¹³ Bicentennial Historical Booklet Committee, 38.

¹⁴ *Bowdoinham, 1762-2012: The Bay, The Land, The People*, 14.

¹⁵ Adams, 230.

¹⁶ Adams, 231.

¹⁷ *Bowdoinham, 1762-2012: The Bay, The Land, The People*, 5.

¹⁸ "Businesses and Owners," Bowdoinham Historical Society website.

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