

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT PART ONE: HISTORIC AND ARCHEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Historic, Archaeological, and Cultural Inventory:

Author Michael Ende was famously quoted as saying “without a past you cannot have a future.” Historic, archaeological, and cultural resources contribute significantly to the character of Readfield’s community today and provide context for future growth and change. This chapter inventories and examines available information on historic and archaeological resources so they can be incorporated into planning for the future. Readfield is fortunate to have an active Historical Society which has done considerable work documenting the town’s history, identifying important resources, and working to educate residents about the town’s past.

Readfield’s Historic Narrative:

Long before European settlers cleared the forest, established farms, factories, and built houses in the region now known as Readfield, Native Americans moved seasonally through the area. The many lakes and navigable streams allowed travel by canoe between the Cobbossee Lake, Belgrade Lakes, and Androscoggin River watersheds. However, the Native Americans and the European trappers who later followed, left little evidence of their migrations through the hills and valleys of Readfield.

By the mid-18th century white settlers were moving into the area from Massachusetts and New Hampshire. In recognition of the many local lakes and ponds, in 1771 a large community known as Pondtown (later called Winthrop) was created; Readfield was part of this larger community. Readfield became incorporated as a separate town on March 1, 1791. The origin of the name is uncertain; one theory is that it was named for Major John Reed, agent for one of the proprietors of the original Kennebec Purchase.

What began as a self-sufficient farming community in the 18th century was transformed into a busy manufacturing center by the mid-19th century. Small industries including canneries, oilcloth factories, woolen mills, and tanneries were aided, at that time by improved roads and easier transportation of goods. With the arrival of the railroad and then later the automobile, these small industries succumbed to competition from larger urban areas and Readfield again became chiefly a farming community.

In Readfield’s formative years, there were five distinct villages or settlements: East Readfield, Readfield Depot, Readfield Corner, Factory Square, and Kents Hill. **East Readfield**, at the intersection of Route 135 and Route 17, consisted of a cider and grist mill, an oilcloth factory, a tannery, an inn, a post office, a brick schoolhouse, and a sawmill. The oil cloth factory burned in 1877 and the business was moved to Winthrop. The remaining buildings were eventually moved or torn down as the village became obsolete. To the casual observer, minimal visible evidence remains of the East Readfield village,

aside from several cemeteries dating back to the late 1700s and the Jesse Lee Church. More recently, the Dr. Hubbard House was another significant East Readfield structure. Unfortunately, it burned down in 2000.

Readfield Depot, settled in the 1820s, flourished with the construction of the railroad in 1849. This small settlement was home to the first Town Farm and the first Town House and an animal pound. Other notable features included four blacksmith shops, a livery stable, several stores, and a grain elevator. There were three poor farms over the years as well. The first was on Walker Road, the second on Tallwood and third on Town Farm Road. None remain standing.

The railroad contributed to Readfield's development as an important community around the turn of the century when many people traveled by rail to spend their summers at resorts such as the Tallwood Inn, the Avalon, the Elmwood Hotel, and other inns. The Moses Whittier House, built about 1780 near the Depot, is one of the oldest houses still standing in Readfield. The Depot School is now home to the Readfield Historical Society, which was incorporated in December 1985.

With the passing of the era of destination resorts, Readfield Depot faded from prominence. The train station was torn down in the late 1950s and the post office closed in 1976. However, several new businesses have opened in recent years giving renewed vitality to the Depot as one of the three remaining active village centers in Readfield. The other two village centers are Readfield Corner and Kents Hill.

Readfield Corner was settled in the late 1780s. Readfield Corner sits at the crossroads of Sandy River Road towards Hallowell (now Route 17) and north to south from Mount Vernon to Chandler's Mills (Winthrop) (now Route 41). As a result of this ideal location, Readfield Corner became a busy commercial center. During the 19th century "The Corner" was a bustle of activity and the town's principal business district.

Early businesses in 1800 included Thomas Smith and Jacob Basford's store, Peter Norton and Samuel Glidden's law offices, and Peter Kittredge's inn/tavern. The Readfield House, a guest inn, was constructed in 1826, followed by the first Masonic Hall in 1827.

In 1876 the Readfield Grange was organized, and a hall was built in 1898. Later, the Gile Hall building was used as a school from 1832 to 1955; it is now presently used for Readfield Town Offices. In 1989, the town purchased the Community House, renovated it, and now uses it as the Town Library.

Unfortunately, on June 11, 1921, a devastating fire destroyed most of the buildings at the Corner's intersection with Main Street and a private residence on Church Road. One of the most notable structures in Readfield Corner, Union Meeting House, remained standing, untouched by the fire. Thereafter, the popularity of the family automobile changed settlement patterns and Readfield Corner never regained its former stature though it remains the town center.

Readfield Corner was also the site of the Readfield Fairgrounds where the Kennebec County Agricultural Society held a fair from 1856 to 1932, promoted as the largest Agricultural Fair in the State of Maine. The local Grange also held an annual fair at the Fairgrounds from 1948 to 1964. Today, the Old Fairgrounds is owned by the Town and boasts trails, a baseball field and historical markers noting the history of that land. The creation of this trail system, ballfields, and monument markers is a respectful nod in acknowledgment to the important history and past that helped to form the culture and character of Readfield today.

Unlike the business district at Readfield Corner, the focal point of **Kents Hill**, Readfield's other village district, was a Methodist Community of church and school. Nathaniel, Charles, and Warren Kent were the pioneer settlers for whom Kents Hill village was named. This part of Readfield, like the Corner, was settled in the late 1780s. Around 1800 Luther Sampson helped to finish the first Methodist Meetinghouse, which was used until the Kents Hill Meetinghouse was built in 1835. That meetinghouse is now the Torsey Memorial Methodist Church. Under Sampson's endowment and direction, the Readfield Religious and Charitable Society was initiated in 1821 and Maine Wesleyan Seminary in 1824, at which time there were several female students, making it the oldest private co-ed school in the U.S. In 1852 a Female College was added, making it the Maine Wesleyan Seminary and Female College. From 1970 – 1915, Wilson and Ella Morse ran the Morse Conservatory of Music, as a part of this educational institution, which awarded graduating students a B.M. degree. It continues to function today as a private college preparatory school called Kents Hill School.

Factory Square, located west of the Corner along Dead Stream, also prospered in the early 1800s. The business in this settlement included sawmills and gristmills owned by James Craig and Joel Bean, a carriage shop, scythe and sash factories, a tannery, a brickyard, a cheese factory, and two woolen mills.

Anson P. Morrill, Governor of Maine from 1856 to 1857, owned one of the woolen mills and provided "Readfield Cloth" for the Union Army, until 1865, at which time he turned over management to his son in law Robert Mills, Esq. and Frederick Hartwell. Readfield Cotton and Woolen Manufacturing Company produced cloth and yarn until 1885, then the buildings were used as a barrel factory from 1914 to 1920. They were subsequently torn down in the 1940s. Today none of the buildings in Factory Square remain.

Maine Historic Preservation Commission Data:

According to the Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC), there are three types of historic and archaeological resources that should be considered in comprehensive planning. They are:

- Prehistoric Archaeological (Native American, before European arrival)
- Historic Archaeological (mostly European-American, after written historic records)
- Historic Buildings/Structures/Objects (buildings and other above ground structures and objects)

Archaeological resources are those found underground and are locations where there have been prior signs for the existence of human beings including structures, artifacts, terrain features, graphics or remains of plants and animals associated with human habitation. Prehistoric archaeological resources are those associated with Native Americans and generally date prior to 1600s. Historic archaeological resources are those associated with the earliest European settlers.

Prehistoric Archaeological Sites:

According to the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, no professional archaeological surveys have been done in Readfield. The non-professional-level surveys conducted identified only one site known as #36.65, which is described as a stone tool found on Lovejoy Pond on June 8, 2020.

According to the MHPC, most prehistoric archaeological resources, particularly habitation/workshop sites, are located adjacent to canoe-navigable water bodies. For this reason, MHPC has identified floodplain and other shoreland areas of the Carlton Pond, Maranacook Lake, and Torsey Pond as sensitive archaeological areas that should receive professional archaeological surveys.

Historic Archaeological Sites:

As of May 2020, one Historic Archeological Site has been identified. The site has been named "Know-Nothing Inscription." The site type is a petroglyph, and its location was given site number ME 367-001. It is speculated to date back to between 1840 and 1860 and its National Register status is currently undetermined.

To date, no professional historic archaeological surveys have been conducted in Readfield. The MHPC suggests that a future archaeological survey be conducted and focus on the identification of potentially significant resources associated with the town's agricultural, residential, and industrial heritage, particularly those associated with the earliest Native American and Euro-American settlement of the town in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Readfield's Historic Buildings/Structures/Objects:

The traditional, recognized standard for what makes a historic or archaeological resource worthy of preservation is normally eligibility for, *or* listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register, administered by the National Park Service, United States Department of Interior, is a listing of those buildings, districts, structures, objects, and sites deemed worthy of preservation for their historic, cultural, or archaeological significance. The National Register is intended to accommodate buildings and sites of national, state, and local significance.

The recognized standard for historic or archaeological resources is listing on the National Register of Historic Places. One benefit of National Register listing is that certain buildings

may qualify for a 20 percent investment tax credit. To qualify, the building must be income producing, depreciable, and a "certified" historic structure. To obtain this certification, the historic or archeological resource must meet criteria mandated by The National Register Criteria for Evaluation, by the National Parks Service. Additionally, the National Parks Service developed criteria for the recognition of nationally significant properties, which are designated National Historic Landmarks and prehistoric and historic units of the National Park System. Both these sets of criteria were developed to be consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's *Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation*, which are uniform, national standards for preservation activities.

Structures on the National Register are also provided a limited amount of protection from alterations or demolition where federal funding is utilized. Readfield has two stand-alone historic structures on the National Register of Historic Places: the Jesse Lee Church, at the corner of Plains Road (RT 135) and Main Street (RT 17) in East Readfield, and the Union Meetinghouse or the Brick Church.

The Jesse Lee Church, built and dedicated in 1795 through the missionary work of Jesse Lee, was the first Methodist Meeting House in Maine. It is also the oldest surviving Methodist church in New England to have remained in continuous use as a Methodist house of worship. The church was added to the list of National Register of Historic Places in 1984.

In 1798 the first New England Methodist Conference was held at Jesse Lee Meetinghouse, attended by an estimated 1,800 people from throughout New England. Bishop Francis Asbury and Reverend Jesse Lee, a charismatic Methodist minister from Virginia, presided. Additionally, town meetings were held at the church alternately with a home or inn in Readfield Corner between 1796 and 1824 before the Town House was built in Readfield Depot.

The Jesse Lee Church building is a modest single-story wood frame structure, with a gabled roof and clapboard siding. A square tower with belfry and steeple rises from the roof ridge. The front façade has a pair of entrances, one on each side of a central sash window. The gable is fully pedimented. The building corners have paneled pilasters rising to an entablature, and the square elements of the tower are also pilastered. The building was originally located further up the hill, but it was moved in 1825 to its present location, at which time the Greek Revival style elements were added.

The Union Meetinghouse, built in 1828 and located in Readfield Corner Village, was open to any religious denomination. The bricks used for the Union Meetinghouse came from Hunt's brickyard in Readfield and the builders were Richard Mace, Jere Page, and Francis Hunt.

Forty-three owners and proprietors of the meeting house petitioned to incorporate as the "Readfield Union Meeting House Company" on June 12, 1828. Each owner of the Union Meeting House held a deed to one or more pews "with an undisputed right to occupy the

same during all public and private meetings held in the same by any religious sect or denomination whatever."

In 1868 over \$8,000.00 was raised and expended for needed alterations and repairs. As part of the renovation, Portland artist Charles J. Schumacher painted Trompe l'oeil on the interior walls. This form of art was quite popular for about 20 years in the mid 1800's. In 1917 the steeple blew off in a big storm creating water damage to the beautiful Trompe l'oeil in the choir loft. The rest remained untouched over the years though throughout Maine other examples of Trompe l'oeil were slowly destroyed through aging or remodeling.

In 1875, the Methodists built a chapel between the Grange Hall and the Captain John Smith House (built circa 1810). It is being revitalized (2021) for use as a community center.

Over 100 years passed before community members fully realized what a treasure the interior of the "Brick Church" held. On July 8, 1982, Readfield Union Meeting House was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in the State of Maine. Today, the Trompe l'oeil art found in this building may be the best example in this country. All but that in the choir loft is original, and \$85,000.00 has been raised over the past 15 years by the Union Meeting House Historical Society to make restoration and repairs possible.

Special open houses are held throughout the year, and each July a Strawberry Festival is held to raise public awareness and money towards maintenance of the Union Meeting House. Tours are given by appointment and during festivals. The Union Meeting House is not heated; however, it is still used occasionally for special functions such as weddings, memorial services, or church services. The Society remains non-denominational.

Several structures within the Kents Hill School property make up Readfield's only Historic District designated as such on the National Register of Historic Places. This is not a district that is in any way regulated by Readfield or anyone else to maintain its historical features. The district designates a group of historically significant structures and limits the use of federal funds to alter the structures. However, there is no significant protection of any sort for these structures and the owner (currently the school) could alter them or tear them down.

There are more than thirty pre-1900 homes and buildings atop Kents Hill with no formal protection measure placed on them. Several homes that were built by the Kent and Packard families remain standing today on Main Street and P Ridge Road. Kents Hill Cemetery is on land originally owned by the Packard family, as is Torsey Memorial Church and several houses on "the Hill." The Nathaniel Thomas house (circa 1790) and first Methodist parsonage on the opposite side of Main Street are other examples of historic structures in Kents Hill. On the west corner of P Ridge Road and Main Street, which for many years was called "Packard Corner," is the (now privately owned) one-room schoolhouse built in 1908 and in operation until 1955.

Threats to Local Historic/Archeological/Cultural Resources:

Nearly all the historic buildings in Readfield are now private homes. None of the town's historic buildings are concentrated in an identifiable "historic district" other than those in the Kents Hill School. Even in the Village Center, the old buildings have been sufficiently inter-built with newer architectural forms that the area does not qualify for protection under federal or state law.

The primary threat to most of these buildings is the desire of their owners, present and future, to alter them in ways that destroy their architectural integrity and character. The buildings' survival in their present form is likely to depend largely upon the willingness of the individual owners to conserve the historic heritage of which their homes are an irreplaceable part.

Protecting Significant Historic and Archaeological Resources:

Although some historic buildings and structures have been lost through fire or neglect, there remain many significant historic buildings in Readfield. In 1975, the American Revolution Bicentennial Commission of Readfield, Maine, published Reflections of Readfield (The Story of our Town) which offers detailed historically accurate information on early Readfield. Used in concert with Early Readfield Maine, a map printed in 1976, a dramatic picture can be pieced together, including geographical locations of the 42 historic structures throughout Readfield.

In 1976, a Historical Records Committee was created to organize Town records. This committee has sorted all known records to date. In 1991, Readfield celebrated its bicentennial as an incorporated town. The Readfield Historical Society, in cooperation with the History Department of Kents Hill School, prepared a social history of the town. The Readfield Historical Society continuously collects, catalogues, and preserves artifacts, photos, documents, scrapbooks, business ledgers, documents, and other historical items pertinent to Readfield history.

There are historical markers located on Mill Stream Road and Gile Road that keep the memory of Readfield's industrial history alive, thanks to the work of the members of the Readfield Bicentennial Committee in 1991 and more recently the Trails and Conservation Committees and Readfield Historical Society.

Existing Land Use Protections:

Due to the lack of traditional "Historic Districts," the existing regulatory protection for historic and archaeological resources is primarily provided through the state subdivision and shoreland zoning statutes. Maine's subdivision statute requires review of the impact on "historic sites," which includes both National Register and eligible buildings and archaeological sites. The State Shoreland Zoning statute includes, as one of its purposes, "to protect archaeological and historic resources." The town's Land Use Ordinance also includes the following language in the design standards, stating that any activity occurring

on or adjacent to sites listed or eligible to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places be reviewed by the Maine Historic Preservation Commission. However, currently there is no protection for potential archeological sites.

There is currently no requirement for applicants proposing development to conduct a survey in areas that may contain historic or archaeological resources.

A number of old homes have been lost over the last decade. Some due to disrepair and decay, some were destroyed by misguided “restorations,” and others were claimed by fire. However, as a proportion of the overall number, those lost represent a small fraction of older homes in Readfield.

Readfield has an active Historical Society, which offers two programs for identifying and highlighting historic homes.

- History in the Streets Program- This program locates historic structures and sites then puts up signage identifying the structure and detailing information.
- Historic Home Sign Program- This program provides owners of historic homes with ‘circa’ signs detailing establishment dates, and other relevant information. This serves to document the history of historic structures.

Both programs are voluntary. They promote Readfield’s historic structures by offering easy access to historical information that adds value to the buildings.

Important Partners for Historic/Archaeological/Cultural Preservation:

- Readfield Historical Society
- Readfield Union Meeting House
- Kents Hill School
- Kents Hill School Historic District
- Maine Historic Preservation Commission
- National Register of Historic Places
- Maine Preservation

Further Resources for Readfield History:

As of April 2021, there are seventeen publications and resources that provide detailed historical information about the Town of Readfield, including books, booklets, maps, and monographs. These documents were used extensively in the creation of this chapter and are considered incorporated in their entirety as part of this historical perspective.

1. Reflections of Readfield (The Story of Our Town) by American Revolution Bicentennial Commission of Readfield, Maine (1975)
2. The History of Winthrop by Everett Stackpole (1925)
3. History of Winthrop by Rev. David Thurston (1855)
4. History of Kennebec County (1892)
5. Kents Hill and its Makers by J.O. Newton and Oscar Young (1947)

6. Dry Beans in the Snow, reflections of Readfield Historian Evelyn Adell Potter (1992)
7. To Those Who Led the Way by Dale Potter-Clark (2009)
8. In Search of Mattie Hackett: A True Maine Unsolved Murder Mystery by Everett Spooner (2012)
9. To Those Who Followed the Lead by Dale Potter-Clark (2013)
10. Along the Lakeshore by Lisa Bondeson (2015)
11. Memories of a Small Town by Lisa Bondeson (2015)
12. The Founders and Evolution of Summer Resorts and Kids' Camps on Four Lakes in Central Maine by Dale Potter-Clark and Charles Day, Jr. (2016)
13. The Paupers and the Poor Farms: Support and Care of the Poor in Readfield, Maine 1971-2018 by Dale Potter-Clark (2018)
14. Brief Bios of Circa 1900 Readfield Residents by Readfield Historical Society (2021)
15. The Escape from Bunker Hill: A Historical Novel about the Underground Railroad, ultimately leading to Readfield, Maine by Dale Potter-Clark (2022)
16. Old Houses and the People Who Lived in Them by Dale Potter-Clark and William Adams, Jr. (future release)
17. Early Readfield Maine Map (printed in 1976)

RELATED APPENDICES:

*GIS Map of Historical / Archaeological Resources

Future Consideration:

- ❖ Consider introducing special policies and/or regulations to protect historic homes and buildings. Currently, Readfield opts for voluntary preservation of homes without government intervention or restrictive zoning and builds on existing programs offered through the historic society.
- ❖ Is a site survey in areas of proposed development something to consider adding to the subdivision/land use ordinance?
- ❖ Does the town feel it is important/necessary to add protection for potential archeological sites to goals?
- ❖ Recommendations by Maine Historic Preservation Commission- have historic archaeological surveys conducted.