



# Town Center Walking Tour

An annual tradition for Mabel I. Wilson 2nd Graders  
Presented by the Cumberland Historical Society

# Some Background...

The original 1680 North Yarmouth settlement encompassed land from Cumberland to Harpswell including Mere Point in Brunswick. North Yarmouth was one of the oldest towns and had one of the largest populations in the province of Maine. Not all settlers could make a living from the original homesteads along the coast, so descendants began to move inland to clear land and build farms.

As settlements spread, far-flung residents found it difficult to attend the church supported by their taxes. Secession plans sprung up throughout North Yarmouth. Harpswell set off in 1758, followed by Freeport and Pownal in 1789, and Cumberland in 1821. The deepest cut came in 1849 when Yarmouth seceded. The coastal community became Yarmouth, and the interior farmland remained North Yarmouth.

The first school in North Yarmouth was built in 1738 in the location known today as the junction of Sligo Road and West Main St in Yarmouth. The first record of a school in Cumberland was on Lot 60 on the Tuttle Rd in 1764.

It had been resolved by the town of North Yarmouth in 1777 "to provide schoolmasters for the outposts of the town." For a time, the schoolmaster held school in different parts of the town in turn, but the school district Enabling Act of 1801 led to the setting up of thirteen districts, several of which were in the present North Yarmouth. By 1814, there were 16 districts.

When the first Cumberland Town Meeting was held in 1821, it appropriated \$550 for the support of schools for the coming year. This was the largest amount appropriated that year for any purpose and such is the case today. At one time, there were 15 school districts in the Town of Cumberland.

During the 1920s, Cumberland became part of School Union 13 comprised of Cape Elizabeth, Falmouth, Cumberland, and North Yarmouth. During the 1940s Cape Elizabeth withdrew; Falmouth followed in 1963.

School District #51 was established in February 1966 which consisted of North Yarmouth and Cumberland. Chebeague Island was part of the Town of Cumberland until 2007 when it seceded and became the Town of Chebeague Island. Pre-K through 5th grade attend school on the island; 6th grade and above attend schools in Yarmouth.

<sup>o</sup>*Ancient N. Yarmouth and Yarmouth, Maine, 1626-1956*, William Rowe, 1937/1980

<sup>o</sup>*Yarmouth 1680-1980 An Illustrated History*, N. Yarmouth Historical Society, 1980

<sup>o</sup>*Cumberland, Maine in Four Centuries*, Phyllis R.S. Sweetser, 1976



**Greely Institute.** Greely Institute was built through the generosity of Eliphalet Greely and his wife, Elizabeth Loring Greely. It opened its doors on September 28, 1868. There was no high school in Cumberland prior to that. Eliphalet Greely was a local shipmaster, Portland banker, Mayor of Portland, and Maine Banking Commissioner.





**Greely Institute Trees.** In 1871, 17 boys at Greely Institute enrolled in the agriculture course; each planted a tree in front of the school after placing an ID tag in a tin can in the hole dug for their tree. Twelve of these trees now remain standing on the lawn in front of the Greely Institute building.

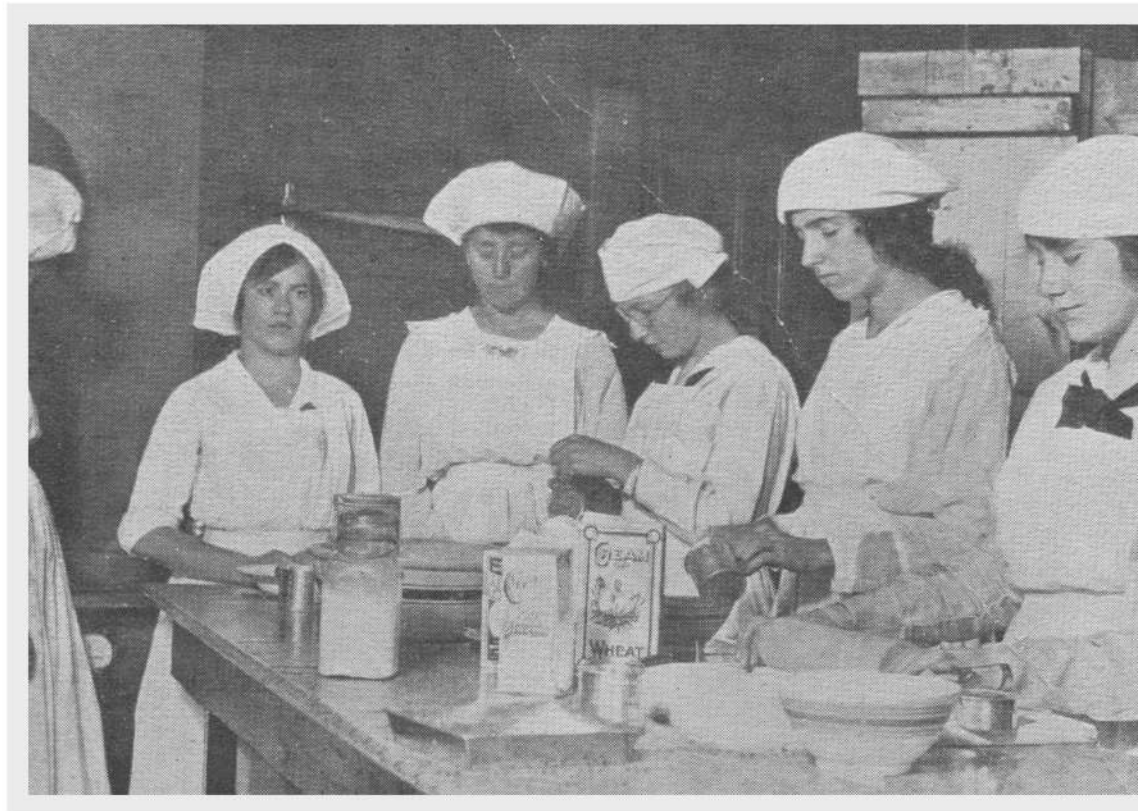


### The Greely Weathervane

The weathervane that adorns the steeple of the Greely Institute building was crowned by a metal replica of a quill feather. Quill feathers were used for writing when dipped in ink, so a weathervane featuring a quill feather would indicate that some kind of intellectual activity was ongoing in the building.



An outdoor session of the agricultural class at Greely Institute in Sweetser's apple orchards.



Domestic science class at work at Greely Institute. Today, girls take math and science classes in the same classrooms as the boys.





**Underground Railroad.** During the Civil War, this was the home of the minister of the Cumberland Congregational Church. It was one of the Underground Railroad's "safe homes" designated for safe passage for slaves escaping from the South and as far north as Canada. The bricks used in this home, Greely Institute, the 1853 District School House, and Prince Memorial Library were all made in a brickyard that was located behind the library.



**Gyger Gymnasium.** The gym was built as a Public Works Administration (PWA) project in 1939 as part of the New Deal. The original name was to be "Cumberland Gym", but ten days before it was to be dedicated, John Thomas Gyger, the Superintendent of Schools, died unexpectedly. Being a well-respected and much beloved official, the committee decided to name it in his honor.



Union Hall. This building was the first exhibition hall for the Cumberland Center Fair when the fair was held in the center of town. It later became part of the school system as a gym, then a lunch room, and then used for classes. It is now the headquarters for the Maintenance Department of MSAD #51.

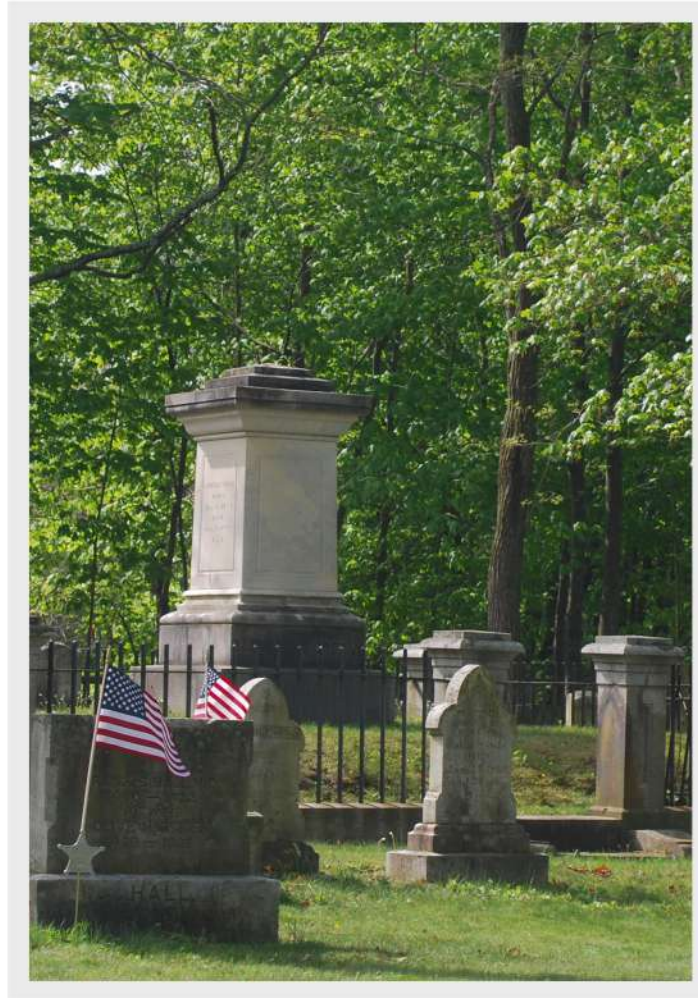




**Congregational Cemetery.** Located on the corner of Main Street and Tuttle Road, there appears to be 537 known burials in the cemetery. It can be safely assumed there are many unknown burials in unmarked graves. The cemetery dates back to about 1798 with Paul Greely being the 1st known burial and Mae Theresa Blanchard the most recent in 1969.

## The Greelys

Eliphalet Greely and his wife, Elizabeth Loring Greely, are buried in the Congregational Cemetery.







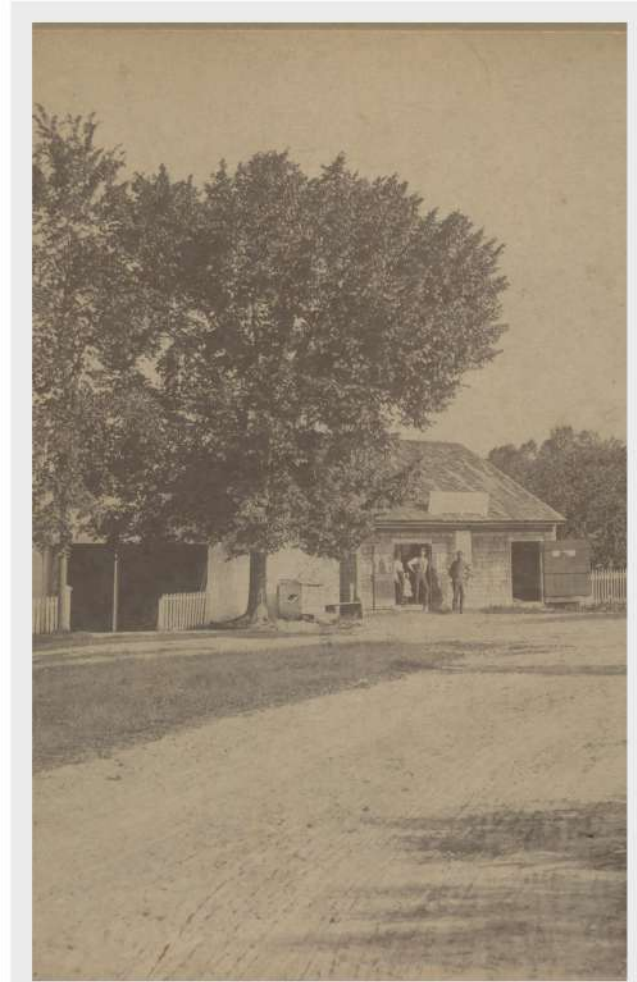
### The Andrew Baston Family

This family suffered the loss of the father and three children, all within about a year of one another to a disease called "throat distemper", now called strep throat. They are buried in the first row of the cemetery. The family home still stands today at the corner of Main Street and Hedgerow Drive.



### Blacksmith Site

Colonel Samuel True's blacksmith shop operated by Samuel and his son, Edward, in the 1850's was located on Main Street across from the Congregational Cemetery. A gas station that opened in 2016 now stands on this site.





### Prince's Tavern

This land was purchased in late 1781 from Jeremiah Powell by James Prince who built the tavern. It became a popular tavern and inn because it was on the main route between points south and north to Lewiston/Auburn. The tavern later was sold to Nathaniel Blanchard as a dairy farm and apple orchard in 1829... staying in the Blanchard family for four generations. The archway in this reproduction barn at the west end of the tavern accommodated the stagecoaches that brought passengers who stayed at the inn. The barn could shelter up to 15 horses.



### The Cumberland Congregational Church

Established in 1793/94, this was the second church in then North Yarmouth to serve the spiritual needs of the people who lived in what is now the Town of Cumberland. Before this church was built, people in this part of the Town of North Yarmouth had to travel to the Old Meeting House under the ledge at the corner of Route #88 and Gilman Road in what is now Yarmouth. This is not the original building. In 1821 the road in front of this building was being reconfigured, and the church would have been right in the middle of the road. The members dismantled the building, using much of the same materials to erect the new one.





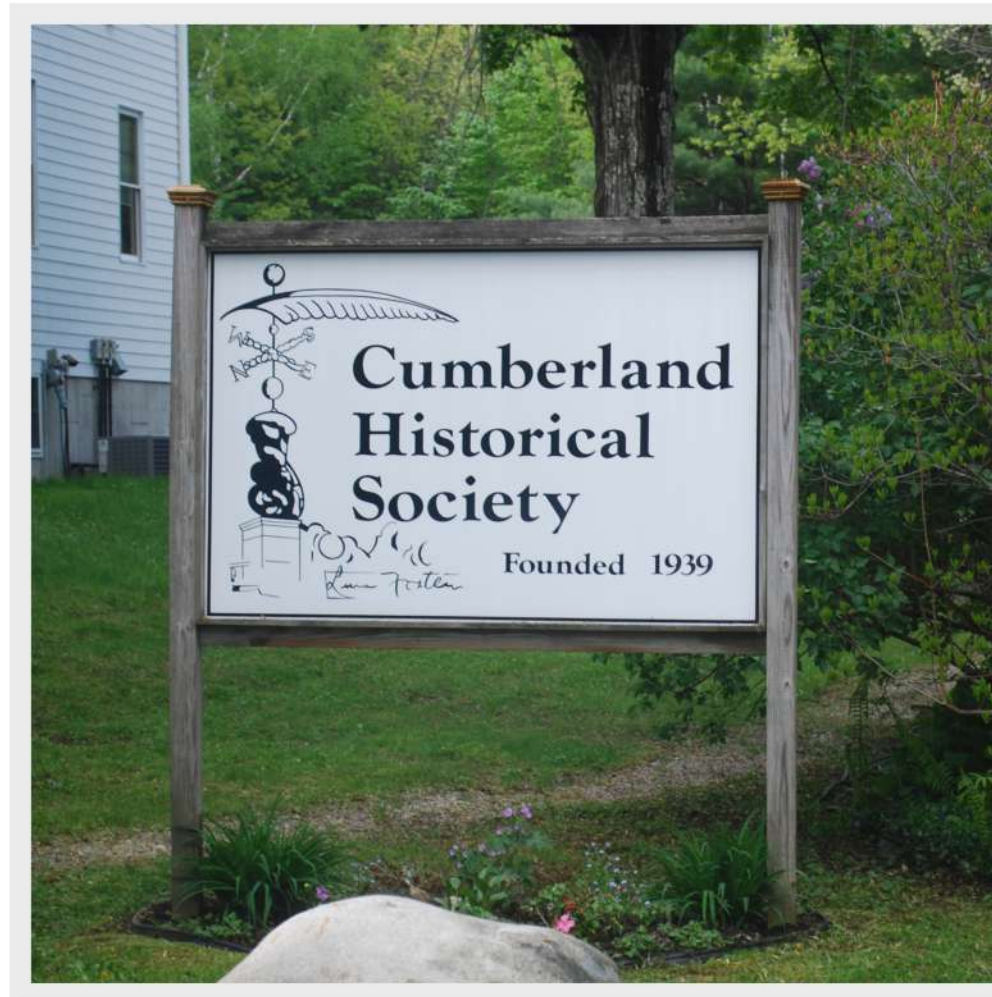
### Merrill Memorial Monument

This memorial was erected in 1928 by Edward Merrill in honor of his father, William Merrill, and his uncle, Louville Merrill, both of whom served in the Navy in the Civil War. It is still a key part of the Memorial Day ceremonies. The parade begins at the Wilson School, then stops at the memorial for a flag ceremony.



## Cumberland Historical Society Sign

Designed by Cumberland resident and Greely art teacher, Lena Foster, the sign displays the symbol of the Greely Institute weathervane as the Cumberland Historical Society's logo.





### District # 3 Schoolhouse 1853

The original District #3 school was located across the street from where the Historical Society building now stands. It was made of wood, destroyed by fire, and rebuilt with brick in the location where it stands today. When the district schools were consolidated it became the Town Office, then the Police Station, and in 1982, it became the property of the Historical Society. In April 2014, the Society sold the building to the Town for \$1.00 in exchange for the Town maintaining and preserving the building.

Mr. Ezra Knight Sweetser & Students in  
Front of E.K. Sweetser Schoolhouse (circa  
1893)

Mr. Sweetser and his wife, Clara Sturdivant Sweetser, lived in the house, known as the Libbeus Tuttle home. It stood where the drainage pond in front of the Mabel I. Wilson School is now. Mr. and Mrs. Sweetser donated a parcel of the west end of their property and some money to have the E. K. Sweetser School built in 1913. That building now houses the MSAD #51 Superintendent's Office.







**Artifacts from the Past.** Inside the Historical Society building, there are many town artifacts to see and touch. Second graders have a lot of fun guessing what items were used for in the past. The title of this photo is, "NO! This is NOT a fly swatter!" Before electric toasters with the pop-up feature, toasting bread over the open flame could require a band-aid.

## Writing Tools

Quill pens and ink, an inkwell, and a slate on display. Some of the desks displayed in this building were used when it was still a school.







George Burgess Chicken House (photo). This building stood where the Mabel I. Wilson School is now located. It was purchased from Mr. Burgess in 1966. It was torn down and burned to make way for the school.

### A Bed Key

Bed keys were used to tighten the ropes on early beds before metal spring mattresses replaced them. Because of the material used (straw, corn husks), various vermin including bed bugs were common in bedsteads. The ropes would be removed each year and would be boiled in a large kettle. If pests had infested the entire bedstead, a feather was dipped into kerosene and brushed into the crevices. This is where the phrase, "Sleep tight, don't let the bed bugs bite" originated.





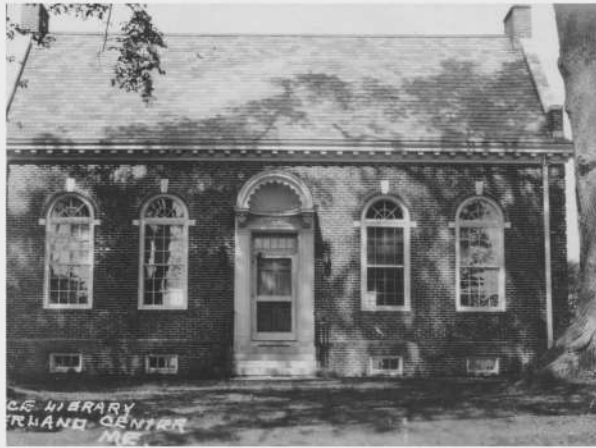
A Niddy Noddy. This tool was used to make skeins of yarn. It consists of a central bar, with crossbars at each end, offset from each other by 90°. The central bar is generally carved to make it easier to hold. Either one of the crossbars would have a flat edge to allow the skein to slide off, or it would be completely removable.

## Sunblock

Parasols were light umbrellas used to protect the skin and hair of ladies from the sun.







### Prince Memorial Library

The First Social Library of Cumberland was founded shortly after Cumberland became a town on March 19, 1821. Up until that time, the Library's book collection was housed in private residences.

The joint will of Carroll D. and Annie L. Prince of Woodfords listed a bequest of \$35,000 to the town Library. The Prince Memorial Library was incorporated in November 1921 and was built for \$20,000.

Prince Memorial Library opened to the public on January 7, 1923, and more than 600 books from the early Cumberland Library joined the new books on the shelves.

The library serves both Cumberland and North Yarmouth residents.





The purpose of the Cumberland Historical Society is to collect, preserve, and display the cultural, historical, and scientific materials that document the prehistory and history of the area now known as the Town of Cumberland with the goal of supporting education and furthering research into its people, culture, and natural world.

Carolyn Small, current Curator and former “Director of Everything” at the Society since 1988, has been conducting the 2nd grade walking tour for the last 15 years because actually seeing the Town’s early history through buildings and artifacts brings the town’s history alive. The tour perfectly complements the 2nd grade community studies curriculum

Translated: Over 1700 children have been directly exposed to Cumberland’ history... with many more to come!

## Some Background History on the Tour



To learn more about the history of the schools in the Town of Cumberland, visit the Historical Society located at 4A Blanchard Rd in the Town Center. For operational hours and more information about the history of the town, visit the Society's web page listed under Community Activities on the town's website...[www.cumberlandmaine.com](http://www.cumberlandmaine.com)