



CUMBERLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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MISSION STATEMENT:

The purpose of the Society shall be to collect and preserve artifacts pertaining to the Town of Cumberland and its history, making it available to groups, schools, and individuals.

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JANUARY THOUGHTS

"The time is always right to do what's right."

"Only in the darkness can you see the stars."

"We may have all come on different ships, but we're in the same boat now."

"One day we will learn that the heart can never be totally right if the head is totally wrong."

Martin Luther King, Jr.

JANUARY STUMPER: What was the Indian name for North Yarmouth?

ON DISPLAY AT CHS: A beautiful display entitled " Job Trends in Cumberland", created by Eagle Scout Ben Follett. He did a lot of research on this project, and it was on display at the Prince Memorial Library for a while. It is now being featured at the museum. Please visit on our next Open House, to view Ben's work.

A Concise History of Cumberland, Maine
By Carolyn F. Small, 2007
Updated 2018

In 1820, a petition favoring separation of Cumberland from the mother town of North Yarmouth was signed by 176 men and presented to legislature. The legislature of 1821 granted an Act of Incorporation for this action, and was approved by Governor William King. The official date of incorporation is March 28, 1821. Thus, Cumberland became its own town, acquiring its name by Capt. Ephraim Sturdivant, who was commissioned to do so by the new government. He chose the name for England's William, Duke of Cumberland.

While mostly an agricultural town, Cumberland has had many and varied businesses in its short history. Many sea captains settled here, maintaining a farm for when they were not at sea. There was, at what is now Town Landing Road, a shipbuilding yard, owned and operated by David Spear, Sr. and his son, David Spear, Jr. The incline at that section of Route #88 is still called Spear's Hill. The Spear residence, still standing at the corner of King's Highway and Route #88, is across the street from Town Landing Road, which goes down to where the shipyard was. In their fifty years of business, the Spears built at least fifty ships. Their last, the *Grapeshot*, was probably the best remembered. She was a fine bark, registering three hundred forty-five tons. Her fame was due to her part in capturing the notorious and elusive felon, William Poole, who had escaped from authorities and was headed for England on the steamship, *Isabella Jewett*. The United States government chartered the *Grapeshot*, a sailing bark, to pursue the ship in hopes of capturing Poole, even though the *Grapeshot* left a day after the *Isabella Jewett* did. Their wish came true, and Poole was apprehended in Fayal, where the *Isabella Jewett* had made a stop. The *Grapeshot*'s final days were far less glamorous. Her last claim to fame, or rather, infamy, was that of a slave carrier in the South.

Other businesses in town throughout the years have been greenhouses (six at various times), apple orchards, blacksmith shops, two corn canning factories, a millinery shop, taverns, two shoemakers, a joiner's shop, a carriage shop, a wheelwright, lumber mills, three butchers, poultry farms, garden farms, dairy farms, and various general stores. Currently, Cumberland is developing and building more businesses along Route#1 and along Gray Road in West Cumberland.

The greenhouses started in the early 1900's, and grew mostly carnations that were shipped from Union Station in Portland to New Jersey and New York. There have been four Chase's Greenhouses, located at various spots in Cumberland. Barbara Blanchard Garsoe remembered the marvelous spicy fragrance of the carnations that her father, Howard Blanchard, then her husband, Bill Garsoe, produced at Sunnyside Greenhouses on Blanchard Road. George and Francis Small, sons of Maurice Small of Small's Greenhouses, recall the tedious and grueling chore of loading up the furnaces with numerous wheelbarrows of coal every day after school. Both were extremely happy when their father converted the furnaces to oil. It was a thrill for them, though, to be able to go into Portland's Union Station with their father to deliver flowers to be transported, and to see the comings and goings of the marvelous steam trains there. Ironically, after Maurice sold the greenhouse on Blanchard Road in 1964, he built a home and smaller Small's greenhouse on Tuttle Road on the site of the first Chase's Greenhouse.

Apple orchards were, and still are, a big business in Cumberland, although only two of the original five continue to succeed. The Sweetser family Apple Barrel boasts of the sixth

generation to be working the orchard. Today, another, owned by Greg and Joanne Fryer on Bruce Hill Road, has reestablished the heritage apples grown on their farm from years past, with hopes of launching a hard cider business from there.

None of the six mills in town exist as mills any more. Two have been converted into elegant homes with the mill stream running through them each. Four of the mills were located in the West Cumberland area of town, operating on the Mill Brook that flows from Forest Lake. The other two were on the Thomes property on Blanchard Road. Before Cumberland became its own town, there was a plaster mill on Felt's Brook, which runs across what is now Route #88, Only one of the dairy farms still exists as such. Springbrook Farm, with Jersey cattle as their source of milk, is another generational farm, with the seventh generation granddaughter of the original owner running it. The farm has been purchased by the Town of Cumberland, with rights to remain operating as a dairy farm indefinitely, in exchange for use of some of their land as recreational fields. Other dairy farms were Nathaniel Blanchard's Broadmoor Farm on Tuttle Road, from 1829 to 1974. The farm was originally a tavern from the late 1700's, was bought by Nathaniel Blanchard, passed to his son Enos, then to his son, George, then to his son, Arthur. After Arthur died in 1972, the farm went out of the Blanchard family in 1974. Leland Brown on Greely Road, Oulton Brothers Farm on Winn Road, James Wilson Farm on Mill Road, A. P. Corey Farm on Main Street, were other large dairy farms. Beef cattle was raised on the Greely Road farm owned by H. D. Ruhm, and beef cattle were raised by Paul D. Merrill, owner of Merrill Transport in Portland. His daughter, Sally Merrill kept and maintained operations at that Sunrise Acres Farm on Winn Road until she sold it. It is still a cattle and market farm.

Two corn canning shops were located in Cumberland Center, one beside the railroad tracks on Longwoods Road, and the other on Main Street. The Longwoods Road factory also canned other vegetables, such as tomatoes, beans and pumpkins. Other industries by the railroad tracks were a warehouse for the Paris Flouring Company, a grain and feed store, a Farmers' Union store, a grain fertilizer and coal store, and a large grain storage silo. The time span for all this industry was 1890 – 1976.

Butcher shops were another business that thrived. Ray Hill had one at the stable of the Cumberland Congregational Church on Main Street. F.R. Sweetser & Son operated his at his apple orchard, the building still existing on the property. Edward B. Osgood had a butcher shop on Main Street, which is now the Food Stop convenience store. Coming full circle, Food Stop now sells fresh meat products now. The sausages made at Osgood's were favored by people far and near. Unfortunately that wonderful recipe died with Rip Burnell. He was the last sausage maker for Osgood's, and he had vowed to E.B. that he would never disclose the formula and ingredients. He was a man of his word.

Poultry farms were prevalent in the area as well. Farmers may have had a small flock of chickens for the purpose of their own use. The tourist trade in the 1920's called for a much larger need of chicken and eggs for the hotels. Thus Mel and Mabel Wilson started one of the large poultry farms on Morrison's Hill in West Cumberland. Other poultry farmers were the Morrill Brothers, Lenville Hawkes, Herm Hult in West Cumberland. In the Center, Oscar Kemp, Ernest Frye, Walter and Willis Thurston, Walter Nelson, William Senior, the Hansons, Marston Sweetser, and George Burgess. Chester and Veatrice Verrill ran a turkey farm on Main Street, near the North Yarmouth town line. In the 1970's, after Chester's death, she sold the land, and

it is now a large housing development. Part of this chunk of land is now the Val Halla Golf and Recreational Center, established in 1964.

Because of the great agricultural influence of the town, the idea arose for a fair to be formed, and in 1868 it came to be. The first Cumberland Fair was held on Main Street between Tuttle Road and Greely Road, with the Congregational Church being the center of the occasion. There were horse races, food and needlework exhibits, and animal shows, much like there is today at Cumberland Fair. The building that was used as the Exhibition Hall at that time is still standing, being used as the Maintenance Office for MSAD#51 beside old Greely Institute. For a few years, because of contentious feelings between West Cumberland and Cumberland Center, there were two Cumberland Fairs being held at the same time. The battling finally stopped, and the Fair combined in the West Cumberland area at the crossroads of Bruce Hill Road and Blanchard Road, where continues today.

The Prince Memorial Library, on Main Street, exists today because Carroll D. and Annie L. Prince jointly bequeathed \$35,000 to the town to erect, equip and maintain such a structure. The building's dedication was held on January 7, 1923. Since then it has had two large additions built.

Schools in Cumberland have ranged from a private girls' school run by Miss Penelope Martin and her sisters, out of her father's home on Route #88 in 1790, when Cumberland was still a part of North Yarmouth, to the present day MSAD #51 structure. Other private schools operated out of other homes, but at the 1821 Town Meeting, money was appropriated for local district schools to be built for children within mile range areas, so they could walk to and from school. These scholars had to provide their own books, and the districts were responsible for getting their own teachers. There was an agent for each district, who supervised the running of the school in his district. At one time there were 15 school districts in town. In 1966, Cumberland and North Yarmouth collaborated and became Maine Administrative District #51.

Greely High School was originally Greely Institute, and was established through the generosity of Eliphalet Greely. He was a Cumberland native, as was his wife Elizabeth Loring, and wanted to give something back to the town that they both loved so much. Having been unable to have children of their own, they decided that a gift of a free public high school would be their legacy. He had made his fortune as a sea captain, a merchant in the shipping business (after he determined that life on the sea was not for him), was the mayor of Portland for several years, and the President of Casco Bank for thirty-three years. He was also on the banking commission for the State of Maine. In his will, he left \$27,500 to be used by the town to erect and supply the school. His widow purchased four acres of land from Enos Blanchard at the corner of Main Street and Tuttle Road, and the school was built. It opened on September 28, 1868, and a dedication ceremony was held the following day. The first graduation was held in 1880, with six graduates; three young ladies and three young men. In the spring of 1871, the students of Greely Institute and many townspeople spent the day leveling the front yard and spreading loam in order to plant trees there. Charles Chamberlain organized the event, plotted the planting plan, and had each student put his name in a can to be buried beside the tree that he planted. Many of those trees are still standing. In 1938 the Federal Public Works Administration helped provide funds to build the Gyger Gymnasium, which was finished in 1939. It was named for School Superintendent John Thomas Gyger. Sadly, he died the week before the building was dedicated. In 2006, at a rededication of the remodeled Gyger

Gymnasium, now the fine arts section of Greely High School (so named when the schools became MSAD #51), several of his descendants, including his two daughters, his son, grandchildren and great grandchildren, attended the festivities.

Churches in Cumberland started in 1793-94 with the establishment of the Northwest Congregational Society of North Yarmouth. A rough structure was built at the corner of what is now Blanchard Road and Main Street. This building was torn down in 1831, and a new one immediately erected, being dedicated on November 8, 1831. With several alterations done to it, the building still stands. Other churches in town are the Foreside Community Church established in 1789. The first of that church was a log cabin which burned in 1792. Another church was built in 1793, and that one burned in 1804. The present building was built in 1811. On Blackstrap Road in West Cumberland stands the West Cumberland United Methodist Church, built in 1813, and rebuilt in 1848. The beautiful chandelier hanging in the church is from the Ruth Blanchard Norton's home on Blackstrap Road in Falmouth, which was originally the Wilson Tavern. The chandelier still has the globes with the Old Gold whiskey logo on them. The Tuttle Road Methodist Church was built in 1882 by the people living in the Poland Corner neighborhood. It has undergone a few additions and alterations, but looks pretty much the same from the road that passes by it.

There were three known taverns existing in Cumberland. The Prince Tavern, later the Blanchard Broadmoor Farm, built in the mid 1700's. James Prince purchased the land from Jeremiah Powell, selling, in 1793, one acre of the land to have a burial ground for the Congregational Church established. The main highway between Falmouth (now Portland) and Bakertown (now Lewiston) ran straight through the archway of the tavern, for the ease of stagecoaches to transfer luggage to the building. Chase's Tavern was located at the intersection of Winn Road and Main Street. Travelers coming from Falmouth(now Portland) to Walnut Hill and on to New Gloucester would have found this a convenient stopping-off place. It burned in 1898. The last tavern, Leighton's Tavern, was built about 1800 by Andrew Leighton on Gray Road in West Cumberland, near the Gray line. Being on the old stagecoach road between Falmouth (now Portland) and Bakertown (now Lewiston) accommodated both travelers and teamsters, refreshing man and beast. It was moved in 1970, and converted to an elegant private residence on Schooner Rocks at Cumberland Foreside, facing Casco Bay.

Two railroad lines ran through Cumberland (only the Maine Central Railroad line is still active) , and two trolley lines used to. The trolley lines went from Portland to Brunswick on Route #88, and from Portland to Lewiston on Gray Road. One railroad, the Atlantic and St. Lawrence Railroad (following as Grand Trunk Railroad, now back to St. Lawrence and Atlantic) began its journey through the town in 1848. It passed through the Poland Corner area and had a station near the Tuttle Road/Middle Road intersection. Following that, the Kennebec and Portland Railroad (since 1871 Maine Central Railroad, now PanAm), with a depot at the Cross Road/Main Street intersection, steamed through town. Both trolley lines stopped running in the 1930's.



The former Morrison Hill station of the Portland-Lewiston Interurban, which served Cumberland from 1915 to 1933. The station is now located at Seashore Trolley Museum.

Cumberland can proudly boast of over 200 homes that are 100 years old or more. The architecture ranges from simple functional houses to rather grand residences. The most prominent style seems to be the wooden 2½ story foursquare center chimney design, with attached outbuildings; the big house, little house, back house, barn fashion. There are some old homes made of brick, but only a few.

The Cumberland Fire Department was started in 1913 as a volunteer department with a Fire Warden heading it up. It is now an upstanding organization with two fire stations, a paid Fire Chief and paid per diem firefighters, about 100 paid on-call volunteer firefighters, an Explorer group of middle school and high school students, learning to be firefighters, and live-in college students, who will make fire service their careers.. The Rescue Unit, established in 1958, has a full-time chief, paid per diem EMTs, and has two rescue units. The Police Department has a full-time paid staff.

From 1821 to 1975, Cumberland operated under the Selectmen form of government. In 1975 it was voted to change it to the Town Manager/Town Council form, which is still in use at the current time.

The islands of Cumberland, Maine are part of Little Chebeague, Broken Cave, Hope, Smooth, Clapboard, Basket, Bates, Stave, Ministerial, Bangs, Sturdivant, Goose, Crow, Sand and Jewell. They all became a part of the new town when it separated from North Yarmouth. They were the islands that were closest to the Cumberland mainland, and were thus chosen to become a part of the new town as a matter of easiest accessibility to attend town affairs and events. In July of 2007, Great Chebeague Island followed the very same footsteps that Cumberland did in 1821, and become a new town of its own.

Cumberland, Maine is a town with a total area of 23.2 miles, a population of more than 7000 residents. It is a suburb of Portland, Maine's largest city, but maintains a very rural atmosphere, stemming back to its original agricultural roots. The neighboring towns are North Yarmouth, Falmouth, Gray, Yarmouth, and Windham. There are five distinct geographical sections of Cumberland. Far inland, bordering Gray, Windham and West Falmouth, is West Cumberland. In

the middle of the town is Cumberland Center, the easterly part of which borders North Yarmouth, at the west it borders Falmouth. At the intersection of Middle Road and Tuttle Road, we have Poland's Corner, although few residents in that area nowadays know that it was named as such. The first Cumberland Post Office was located in this part of the town. The stretch of Cumberland along Route #88, running parallel to Casco Bay that is called Cumberland Foreside. This is the only part of the mainland that has a separate ZIP postal code. Cumberland Foreside is bordered on the south by Falmouth and on the north by Yarmouth. The fifth and final section of town is the Casco Bay islands.

Sources:

Cumberland in Four Centuries; Phyllis Sturdivant Sweetser; 1976
Ancient North Yarmouth and Yarmouth; William Hutchinson Rowe; 1926
Shipbuilding Days in Casco Bay, 1727-1890; William Hutchinson Rowe; 1926
History of the Town of Cumberland, Maine; Mrs. F.R. Sweetser; 1921
Old Times North Yarmouth, Maine 1877-1885; Augustus W. Corliss; 1977
Conversation with Barbara Blanchard Garsoe
Conversation with George Small
Conversation with Francis Small
Conversation with Philip Chase
Conversation with Shirley Verrill
Excerpt from Nancy Wilson Latham's history of the West Cumberland United Methodist
Yarmouth Historical Society scrapbook collection
Cumberland Historical Society Archives

WELCOME: Two new members have joined us! Welcome to Julie Vadas and her daughter, Melissa Smithwick.

ACQUISITIONS: A photo of the West Cumberland Methodist Church taken in the late 1890's, sent to us from the Bridgton Historical Society. It is a photo that we did not have, so was very much appreciated. A thank-you note was promptly sent!

A panoramic photo of Greely Institute taken in 1941, showing the entire student and faculty, donated to us by Ginny Anderson from North Yarmouth. Her father, Robert Anderson is one of the students, as is Phil Chase, Herb Foster, Norma Seekins, Ray Seekins, and Dick Sweetser. I hope to contact some of those folks to see if they can help identify any of the others.

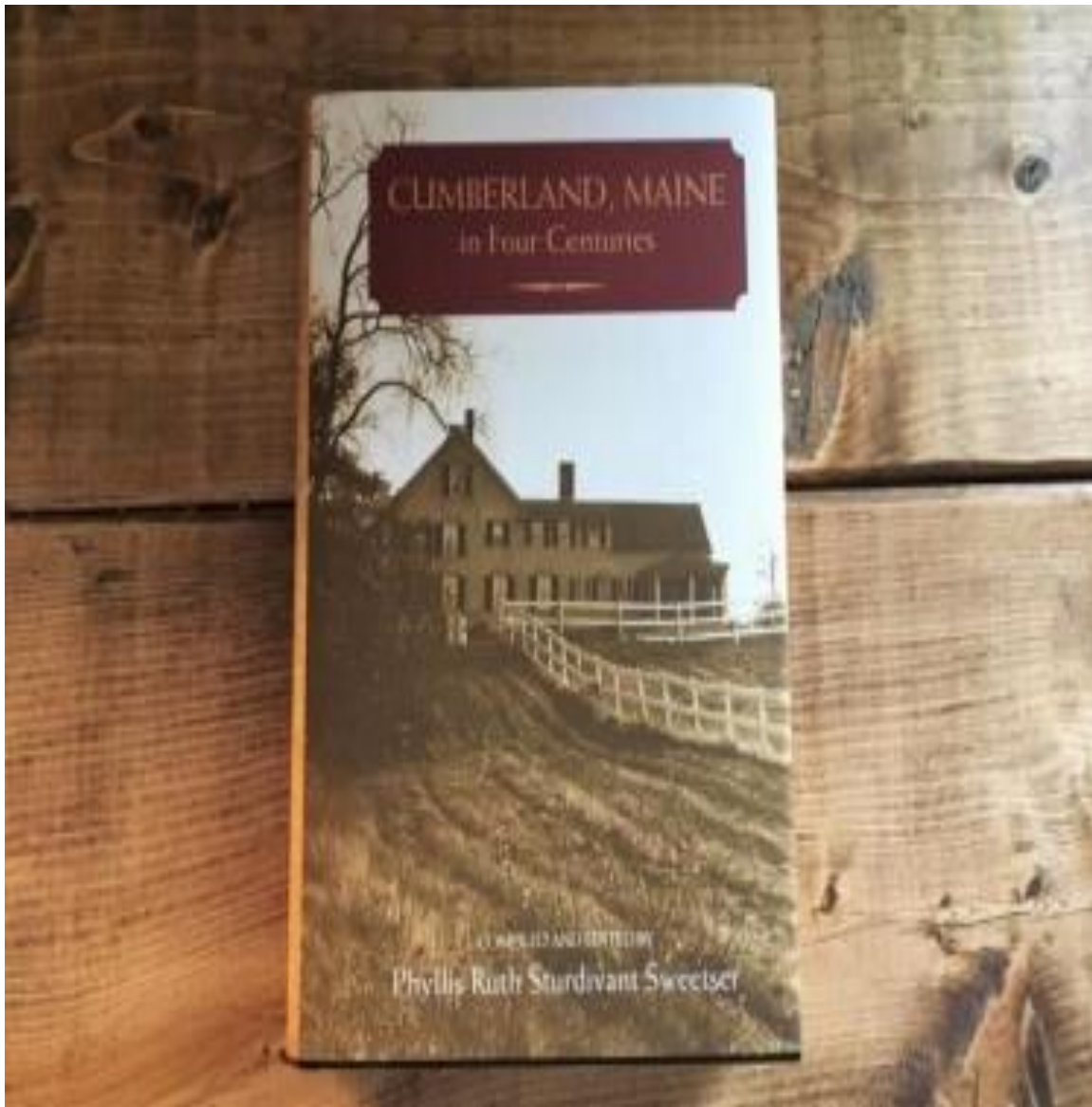
CONDOLENCES: To Pam and John Ames, Jr. on the death of his father, John Ames, Sr.

OUT AND ABOUT: If you are looking for some interesting things to do while we wait to get our programs in place, check out Prince Memorial Library and some of the other historical societies. Maine Historical Society, Skyline Farm, and the Tate House have some good "stuff" going on.

We are looking to the membership to make suggestions on what you would like to have for programs. We have a few coming up, but have no definite dates set up yet. There will be another scavenger hunt in May, a history of the Cumberland Police Department, and a quilt program at some point with new member and quilt expert, Kathy Kenny. Some other ones have been suggested, but we are waiting to get these in place before we go ahead with these.

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## Cumberland, Maine in Four Centuries



**ANSWER TO THE JANUARY STUMPER:** Wescustago, also spelled 'Wescustago', also spelled Westcustago, is derived from two Abenaki words, Wescus, meaning clear, and tegooe, meaning a stream moved by wind or tide, therefore meaning a clear stream moved by wind or tide. It was the original name for what we now know as the Royal River.



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The Cumberland Historical Society (CHS) was founded in 1939 through the dedicated efforts of Herman and Phyllis Sweetser. The meetings were first held in the Prince Memorial Library; in 1989 the CHS moved into a home of its own. That building was built in 1853 as a one--room schoolhouse; the bricks of which were fired right in the town. The CHS is a group of 100 or so members; a totally volunteer group. Open Houses are held on the second and fourth Saturdays of most months, and on Memorial Day after the parade. In May, a two-hour walking historical tour of the center of town is given to the second grades at the Mabel I. Wilson Elementary School as a part of their community curriculum. Individual tours are offered to anyone else who contacts the CHS. Historic bus tours are usually scheduled through the Cumberland Recreation Department. There are over 200 homes in the town that are over 100 years old; 50 from that inventory are over 200 years old. The museum is the repository of an interesting collection of artifacts that connect with the town. They range from home deeds from the 1700's to pieces of dinnerware brought back from England by one of the town's sea captains to his wife. Indian artifacts, Revolutionary War, Civil War, WWI and WWII, and Korean War items are available to view. A number of family genealogies and histories of businesses of the town are in development.

The Cumberland Historical Society is located at 4A Blanchard Road, in the center of Cumberland, about 13 miles north of Portland, just off of Route 9, which is Main Street for the town.