

WELCOME TO SEARSPORT

In 1770, Searsport, located on the western shore of Penobscot Bay, near its head, was part of the larger Frankfort Plantation area known as West Prospect. Only 23 families lived here. After the Revolutionary War, coastal trade fostered ship building, and the population began to grow. When the village of West Prospect petitioned the Maine State Legislature to be set off as a separate town, the petition was granted, and the area was incorporated as the Town of Searsport on February 13, 1845. The town fathers, hoping for a relationship that would be profitable in the future, named the new town for David Sears, a wealthy summer resident on Sears Island. Mr. Sears gave the town \$1000 for the construction of a Town Hall and donated his personal library which became the first town public library. However, he was displeased with the appearance of the completed Town Hall saying it looked like a powderhouse, and the relationship ended.



Main Street in 1875.

For the better part of the 19th century, the Searsport shores were busy with ship building and supporting industries. Close to the shipyards were steam sheds for bending timber and planing, blacksmith shops, an iron foundry and a sail loft. Over 200 sailing vessels of different rigs were built in some 13 different shipyards on the half mile of shore front extending from the foot of present day Navy Street to the foot of Leach Street.

One large shipyard was situated on the west side of Sears Island. Another, the Merrilhow Yard was located at the foot of Elm Street. The McGilvery family operated three yards; other families, such as



Site of former lumber and grain mill on Main Street.

the Carvers, Fowlers and Smiths, all owned productive yards. Sometimes a family would build a yard for just one ship.

These vessels were not only Searsport built, but Searsport owned as well. Often the Captain, the builder and the local citizens owned shares. Searsport produced more ship masters than any town of similar size in the United States. In 1885 one tenth of all full rigged ships sailing under the American flag were commanded by Searsport Captains.

The era of sail ended about 1900 when ship building technology changed to steam and metal. The yards were used to moor small fishing vessels or allowed to disintegrate into the sea, while other industries took their place.

In this transition period, the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad had extended its line to Searsport and built a wharf at Mack Point, at the foot of Trundy Road. From here they shipped coal, chemicals and fertilizer. They also had passenger service, and for a while, there was a vacation inn located within walking distance of the rail terminal. In these years, the Eastern Steamship Line docked at the foot of Steamboat Avenue so their passengers could disembark and walk to the fine Searsport House on Main Street where they could enjoy the area and its lobster and clams. During World War II, a unit of the Army Transportation Corps supervised a munitions depot at the Point, and ammunition was shipped to the European Theater.

By the 1900's brickmaking was also an important

industry. All that was needed to make bricks was a bank of fine clay and a source of water, both of which were easily available. Lumber and grain mills were built beside the streams, and small factories producing various items such as gloves provided employment. The grist mill located on the Mill Stream was converted to a lumber mill in these years and produced large amounts of lumber for export. Before electric refrigeration, ice cut from frozen ponds was packed in sawdust and shipped all over the world.

In 1923, Mosman Park was officially dedicated, signaling the success of a group of private citizens who purchased the property in order to assure continued access for the public. The four acres of fields and shorefront land at the foot of Water and Mosman Streets which had been used by townspeople as a swimming and recreation site for decades through the generosity of the Mosman family, has kept its fields intact, while adding a small playground for young children as well as steps leading to the shore.



Paper note from the Searsport bank organized in 1853.

Courtesy Penobscot Marine Museum

A heavy iron ring embedded in a rock on the eastern edge of the Park remains as an artifact of the McGilvery shipyard which was just below on the beach. A memorial stone dedicated to the Searsport men who fought in WWI is placed beside the Park's flagpole. Each Memorial Day townspeople gather to cast a wreath into the bay as "Taps" echoes across the harbor.

Today, new piers and modern cranes accommodate larger container and prepackage ships at Mack Point. Tourists arrive by automobile instead of by steamship and railroad. Searsport remains proud of its seafaring heritage. The Town continues to value the new industry, the shops and homes in its historic districts, the fine museums, the beautiful coastline and rich small-town community life.