

Chapter 5

Cultural Resources

Historic and Archeological

The chapter on Acton's local history indicates that the town has a colorful heritage of industry and prosperity. That heritage is worth preserving, as a reminder of things gone by and a message to the future. Acton's current era as a lake resort community could pass just as its bustling farm and mill economy faded 100 years ago.

The Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) has provided data on prehistoric archeological sites, historic archeological sites and sites either on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

One prehistoric archeological site was found in Acton. The site is located near Acton Ridge. Prehistoric archeological sites have evidence of Native American activity prior to the arrival of Europeans. For the most part, they are found along ridge lines and also near rivers and other water bodies. The Maine Historic Preservation Commission recommends further survey work along lakeshores, river banks and sandy soils near streams in the town of Acton to identify other possible sites. Most of the prime frontage areas have been extensively developed, which makes it important that the town examine remaining possible areas for signs of prehistoric settlement, prior to their development.

State records list only one historic site in Acton -- 19th-century silver mines, of which only a few water-clogged shafts remain. But local knowledge reveals a great many more artifacts of both structural and historical significance. Among them, the Great East Canal, at the foot of Great East Lake, and the Town Pound on the Milton Mills Road, both well-preserved examples of dry masonry. Three churches in Acton -- Milton Mills Baptist, South Acton Baptist and Acton Corner United Church -- contain some significant examples of early 19th Century architecture and decoration, as does the Town House. The Lincoln School, while not noteworthy as architecture, contains some not-so-distant memories of the era of neighborhood schoolhouses.

Acton is also the site of several cemeteries of significance, ranging from the family plot of a prominent Revolutionary War veteran, to the large Maplewood cemetery adjacent to the South Acton Church. In fact, a shortage of vacant cemetery space is one of the issues facing the town in its evaluation of public services.

The best examples of historic residential architecture are clustered in the South Acton/Milton Mills area. Acton Corner village, formerly a substantial commercial center, contains very few vestiges of its historic past.

The Acton-Shapleigh Historical Society has done much to protect historical records of the town and the town itself is working to restore Lincoln School as a museum. Since maintenance of Acton's rich history can serve both to preserve Acton's small town character and attract the interest of visitors, it may be worth any time and money spent in

restoring old sites and buildings, and identifying historic or archeological points of interest. This is also a recommendation from the MHPC.

Farming in Acton

To some degree the farming situation in Acton reflects the decline of farming in York County. Since 1982 those who list farming as their principal occupation has declined from 253 to 225 in 1997 on a county level. The number of farms has decreased from 586 to 499. Perhaps most significantly the average size of a farm has decreased from 170 acres to 117 acres in 1997. Acton may be well aware of the loss of orchard acres. The number of orchard acres went from 1,593 in 1982 to 728 in 1997.

Farming may represent more than the buying and selling of produce. It may represent a landscape that residents know and love as well as an economic enterprise which provides other benefits to Maine's economy. Within York County there are 7 farmer's markets, 56 farmstands, 15 pick your own enterprises, 3 community supported agricultural ventures as well as fairs, farmdays, and other events at both the county and local level. These are important aspects of life in rural York County and also as far as marketing the state to tourism interests and as a way of life.

In Acton and the surrounding communities farming as a way of life and occupation is severely threatened. The map "Lands Not Readily Available for Development" shows the parcels now included in the Farm and Open Space Program. These are predominantly Orchards in town located off Route 109 and the H-Road. These are important not only for the apples but for the character they bring to the community. A community visioning meeting for the Three Rivers Land Trust in 2002 highlighted the role these farms play in the community –particularly to the scenic views and character they create. They were listed as amongst the more valued resources in town.

However there are a number of other farms in Acton which, while small scale in nature do provide farm products and are a component of the landscape within the town. These include:

- Blueberry Hill farm in South Acton
- Hurd Farm- South Acton –Cattle
- Kelly, Smith and Romac Farms – off Rte. 109 and H Road – Apples
- Highland Acre Farm –Nursery Stock- Acton Center
- Kysack – South Acton- Elk
- Davis –South Acton – Maple Syrup
- Daigne – North Acton –Maple Syrup

Summary Discussion

While Acton seems to contain a number of historical assets, there appears to be a need to better chronicle and survey those assets. At the current time there appears to be little in the way of protection for the historic and archeological resources of the town – primarily

because of insufficient knowledge of their location. Rules and standards for protecting these resources need to be developed as the town continues to grow.

The towns farming heritage also appears threatened although this may be more due to issues of global and national competition in the agricultural market than with anything happening locally. However, through the farmland program, the actions of local land trusts in buying development rights and diversifying their use of their land (such as developing ski trails, seasonal events, etc.) there are now more options to reduce costs and provide revenue. Opening up other opportunities at these farms outside of farm products (such as cross country skiing) may also play a role in maintaining these farms. Open space development and the protection of scenic viewsheds can also help as an important regulatory option.