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History of Camden Maine

Barbara Dyer

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CAMDEN *Maine*

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History

Camden, located in mid-coast Maine has been called the prettiest spot in Maine. It is one of only two places on the Atlantic seaboard where the mountains meet the sea.

Settlers were here as early as 1768, and it was known as Cambden Plantation unofficially known as Megunticook, a Native American name meaning "big mountain harbor". When the population reached 331, a town government was needed so they could build roads, bridges, schools, etc. Camden at that time included Rockport, West Rockport, Rockville and Glen Cove. A petition was sent to the General Court of Massachusetts at Boston and approved. Prior to statehood in 1820, the District of Maine was part of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. It read in part:

"In the year of our Lord, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-one." An act to incorporate the Plantation of Cambden, in the county of Hancock into a town by the name of Cambden.

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Storage

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In the house of Representatives, February 16, 1791, this bill, having had three several readings, passed to be enacted: David Cobb, Speaker

In the senate, February 17, 1791, this bill having had two several readings, passed to be enacted, Samuel Philips, President

Approved, John Hancock

The Act in full may be seen in the Camden Town Office, with original signatures.

It is believed that Brigadier General Samuel Waldo met with Lord Chancellor of England, 1st Earl, Lord Cambden, Charles Pratt, to secure a royal land grant for this area in 1768. Thus the Town was named for Lord Cambden. An earlier English spelling was Cambden, and later changed to Camden after the death of Charles Pratt; the change was made by his son, John Jeffrey's Pratt, 2nd Earl and 1st Marquis of Camden.

For two hundred years, Camden was a manufacturing town. It was noted for its vessel building, with the first documents vessel in 1792. Shipyards continued from Bay View Street to the head of the harbor and on Eaton's point. Deacon Joseph Stetson and H.M. Bean were two of the most profile builders. The Bean Yard built the second five-masted schooner. JOHN B. PRESCOTT, and the first six-masted schooner ever built, GEORGE W. WELLS. Bean's son Roberta Bean built several schooners during World War I. Twenty years later the yard was brought to life for World War II. In less than four years it built tow minesweepers (AMc's), 11 troop transports (APc's), four coal barges (MCC's), 12 rescue salvage tugs (ATR's) and one fisherman (CWW). After WWII, another company was formed, and from 1945-1063 it constructed 31 custom-built yachts.

On the three-mile Megunticook River, there were dams making water power enough to run woolen mills. The Knox Woolen Mill was the largest and ran the longest from the middle 1800's to 1988. Half of Camden's population worked in the mill, as did people from outlying towns. It had the largest payroll in town for many years.

The Camden Anchor Works, run by the Alden family, began business in 1866 and it became the largest plant of its kind in the country. Their anchors were famous and traveled on stately ships that sailed all over the

world. Their blazing fires and ringing trip hammers were seen and heard for miles across the Penobscot Bay. In 1900 it was sold. It was known as the Camden Anchor-Rockland Machine Company that built boats, launches, dories and the well known Knox Gasoline Engine.

The Knowlton Bros. Foundry manufactured just about anything needed for vessels, including pumps, blocks, winches, windlasses derricks, dead eyes, etc. These were purchased not only by Camden builders but orders from everywhere.

Tibbetts Industries employed many who worked making small electronic parts, and Camden had several smaller industries.

Around Camden harbor there are lobster men, fishermen and the windjammers sailing weekly, as well as some day trippers. On the east side is a yacht repair, service and storage facility.

Young men and women left Camden to serve their country. Camden was the Revolutionary War center for the Penobscot Bay area. Vessels were built and repaired for the War of 1812. A boulder was placed in Harbor Park honoring the Spanish-American War veterans, and located nearby is a statute for the Civil War veterans. The town honors all the others who served their country from Camden with a beautifully granite Honor Roll in the Village Green, with over 1100 names.

Camden has always been a “tourist town”, with its lakes, rivers, harbor and mountains. People started coming to Camden around 1857 for vacations in guest homes. By the 1890’s they began to build large summer “cottages” and many residents were employed by those families. There are still homes owned by people, who came only on vacations, mostly during the summer. The population has grown to about 5000 residents, and there are fewer industries and more businesses accommodating the tourists trade. It is such a beautiful town that while some natives never leave, others go away for employment but many return home to retire. People from large cities are finding it a great retirement community.

Written by,

Barbara Dyer

Town Historian

Official Website of Town of Camden, Maine

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