Brewer Historical Society

A HISTORY OF

BREWER

MAINE

Early History

It was a warm September afternoon in the year of 1770 as two men walked silently along an old Indian trail following the banks of the Penobscot River north and west from its mouth on Penobscot Bay in mid-coast Maine. The air was fragrant with the aroma of autumn. There was a special feel to the day, quiet and desolate yet invigorating and exciting. It was certainly different from the civilized activity around Boston Massachusetts from which one of the men had only recently departed. Except for the Indians that used the path on seasonal migrations, there were no fellow travelers. There were no guideposts or welcoming lodging. There was nothing except the wilderness.

The first few changes in foliage could be seen in the trees; maple, beech, and birch. There were autumnal colors of orange and yellow and red scattered in among the verdant green of the hardwoods and evergreens. The sky displayed a unique New England clear blue that signified a different angle of sun and a change from the bright white summer light as it marched towards the cobalt of late fall. A few leaves had fallen onto the path and the crunch of foliage beneath their boots had a crisp clear sound. All else was quiet. The birds and insects were silent in the afternoon warmth and the animals of the forest were wary of these interlopers

into their property and stayed hidden in the undergrowth. The land around them was forested with an almost impenetrable barricade of trees, for this was the sylvan tapestry of primordial country. Glimpses of the dark river were always available as the travelers meandered along the trail and the sunlight sparkled on the water's surface.

One traveler was named John Brewer. He was twenty seven years old, slim and well built. His companion was William Crawford, a physician from the military post of Fort Pownal at the mouth of the river. As the men walked, John felt the excitement of his journey and what he hoped to accomplish for his young wife, who had remained in Massachusetts along with their newborn baby boy. It was John's plan to seek out the best water supply to power a saw-mill and begin a settlement in the beautiful area at the head tide of the river, a head tide about twelve miles from the mouth. He had been in the area before as part of a hunting and fishing expedition and with the assistance of Dr. Crawford, his sister's husband, believed he could create a new life for his family, one that matched his personality. He knew he did not wish to be part of his parent's life in Massachusetts.

That evening they stopped by the edge of the river, built a fire and had a supper

of provisions brought from the fort. The evening became cool and the sounds of night filtered through the trees. There were the frogs and crickets beginning their evening courtship rituals and the sound of the leaves in the forest as small animals began their daily routine of hunt and be hunted. John didn't see anything, but he knew they were there. It was a good time to be alive, he thought. He was young and excited about what life had to offer him and the confidence to believe that he could accomplish whatever he wanted. He talked with Dr. Crawford about all the things that young men do. He talked of his wife and family and his hopes and dreams. They talked of what they hoped to find the next day as they approached the head tide. This was his first night in the area that he hoped to become his home and it was heady stuff. The sky had been lit up with stars as he had never seen them before. There were no competing lights from a city or town and in the northern sky were innumerable stars. He had been told that there were times when the northern lights could be observed, but that night belonged to the stars.

John Brewer, recognized as one of the first permanent settlers on the Penobscot River, was born in Weston, Massachusetts on May

17, 1743 to Josiah and Hannah Brewer (Woolson) and was descended from Corporal John Brewer who lived in Sudbury, Massachusetts as early as 1642. Josiah was a representative to the General Court of Massachusetts and moved his family to Worcester where he was a selectman. They had nine children of whom John was probably the youngest.

John obtained his early education in Weston, and finished it at Worcester.

As a man, John Brewer was described as "slender, but rugged, a mind well balanced and sound rather than aspiring, and a countenance sedate rather than brilliant".

In June of 1769, John married Martha Graves of Sudbury and their first child was born a year later on May 1st, 1770 at Worcester. They named him Josiah.

The same year that his first son was born, the 27 year old John Brewer decided to begin a settlement in Maine and start a sawmill. He had knowledge of the sailing and milling industries, but decided on milling as a vocation. It was said that he was attracted to the beauty of the location and an abundant supply of water power, so he probably had made a prior expedition to the area. John's brother-in-law, Dr. William

Crawford, was married to his sister Mary and was a surgeon stationed at Fort Pownal (Fort Point) at the mouth of the Penobscot River. That may also be a factor in his choosing the region. After John's small vessel reached Ft. Pownal from Boston in September of 1770, Dr. Crawford accompanied him on his first exploratory search. John did not take his family on this first year. His son would have been only a few months old and his wife recovering from childbirth.

John Brewer and Dr. William Crawford made their way up the river to look for a potential mill site. According to Brewer's journal they walked the twelve miles up along the river using an old Indian trail. They inspected the mouth of the Segeunkedunk. (Sededunkeuk as stated by the many Indians in the area) stream, and after exploring the river up to the rapids at the head tide (present day Eddington), settled upon the original landing spot. That fall, John and Dr. Crawford explored the Segeunkedunk stream up to the pond at its headwaters (present day Brewer Lake) and also laid the foundation for the mill-dam at what became known as Brewer's Cove. In December, they left for the winter and John returned to Massachusetts.

The following April of 1771, John returned

with his brother Josiah, Dr. Campbell and several workmen. They built a landing, completed the mill dam and built a saw-mill upon it. John Brewer's sawmill was the first on the Penobscot River and the remains of the dam are still there. They felled trees and constructed a log cabin above the mill and across present day Main Street in the area where the Harriman home was later built. That house was the first in the community. As before, John returned to Massachusetts for the winter.

In April of 1772, John returned permanently with his family and 21 others, including his older brother Josiah. Josiah built a house on a point of land across the stream from John Brewer's landing (part of the land that has been a paper mill and is presently Cianbro Constructors, Modular Manufacturing Company). This group formed the founders of a community which would be known as New Worcester. New Worcester later became the town of Orrington.

John, his brother Josiah and Dr. Campbell became partners in the mill. Dr. Campbell sold his interest to Col. Thomas Goldthwait, the commander of Fort Pownal, but Brewer purchased it back from him in November of 1774.

Now that there was a consensus of settlers to develop a permanent settlement in the area, the founders needed consent from the general court of Massachusetts and a land grant from England. There was no Maine before 1820 and the area was part of Massachusetts. The founders received the consent from the court for a 58 square mile tract of land that would run twelve miles along the river from Bucks Ledge (present day Bucksport) to the tidewater (present day Eddington) . It would continue inland to present day Holden. The settlement was surveyed as Plantation Number 9, to be later known as New Worcester. By law, the land grant had to be issued within three years so a representative, Doctor Calef of Ipswich, Massachusetts, was to be sent to England.

Unfortunately, the hostilities of the Revolutionary War (1775-1783) would prevent the grant from being issued and it would not be until after the war that New Worcester was to become legally recognized.

Prior to the Revolutionary War, the British occupied Castine (called Bagaduce at the time) a town near the mouth of the Penobscot River and had since 1760. They patrolled the river and after the hostilities of Lexington and Concord (1775) many of the 160 people that occupied the settlement,

known as New Worcester, became increasingly worried about the British presence. During the war many families resettled temporarily or permanently back to Massachusetts or the Kennebec river area. However, some families stayed in their homes so the settlement was never completely abandoned. John Brewer was among those who remained. In 1776 he was made a captain in the militia and his older brother, Josiah, a colonel.

On June 16, 1779, English General Francis Mclean landed at Castine with 650 soldiers and built a fort. With the colonies at war and the British enemy occupying the area, the settlers decided to send Captain Brewer and a man by the name of Smith (from Marsh Bay, which is the present day town of Frankfort) to see General McLean and determine the British intentions. General McLean told Brewer and Smith that the settlers would not be bothered as long as they remained peaceful.

The next month, Brewer and other settlers made trips to Camden to stay aware of what was happening in the colonies and with the state of the war. What information they received is unknown, but a month after the first meeting with General McLean, Brewer and Smith returned to the fort at Castine and were again told that the settlers would be left

alone if they remained peaceable. While at the fort, Brewer and Smith noticed that there was an increased amount of activity and decided they had better leave immediately. No sooner had they departed, when there was a general call to quarters and the fort was secured.

When leaving the area, Brewer saw an American fleet of ships sailing from the south. This fleet was known as the "Penobscot expedition" and was a flotilla of American war ships under the command of Commodore Saltonsall and General Solomon Lovell. Afraid that his small boat would be caught in the attack, Brewer sailed to the safety of a cove on the south side of the river at what is now called Ft. Point. He stayed the night and the next morning when he saw his brother Josiah (now a colonel in the militia) rowing ashore under orders to secure the area in and around present day Bucksport (called Buckstown at the time). Brewer was taken to the American ships to report on British operations. Captain Brewer suggested that the fleet could take Castine, but the commodore decided to wait. Brewer was ordered back to the settlement to await further orders. During this time Captain Brewer performed some operations with his brother in and around the Castine area.

The decision to wait to attack Castine turned

out to be disastrous because the British received naval reinforcements forcing the American fleet up the Penobscot River where the ships were destroyed, either by the British or the Americans themselves to prevent the British from taking them. Many of the ships were destroyed in the Bangor-Brewer area of the river and remnants of the expedition have been discovered and some are still there. The Americans fled to the woods and the American fleet had one of the worst defeats in American naval history.

Among those American soldiers who were engaged in action at Castine, twenty or thirty became sick or were wounded. They were taken to Brewer's home where they were treated and fed. Later, they were transferred to a Mr. Treat's home above the head-tide of the Penobscot. Brewer again went to see General McLean who told Brewer that he could take the sick and wounded to Boston. Brewer obtained provisions, chartered a ship fitted with bunks and platforms, and hired a master to command the vessel. When Brewer got under-way he learned that Captain George Ross, one of the commanders of the ruined fleet had been wounded and was seeking passage to Boston. Brewer picked him up despite the fact that Captain Ross was not on the original authorized list of evacuees. Captain Mowatt of the British fleet was in

charge of the operation and discovered that Brewer had transported Captain Ross. Mowatt was incensed and threatened to kill Brewer, but later the affair blew over.

It occurred to Captain Brewer that he was not safe in the area because of his wartime activities coupled with the fact that he was politically a member of the Whig party. During the Revolutionary war, this meant that he opposed alliance with Great Britain and supported the revolution. So, in 1779 He decided to return to Massachusetts for the duration of the war. He packed up his family and belongings and loaded them on a large scow brought up by a Major Ulmer. Brewer himself took his stock and the stock of others in the settlement who were leaving and drove them through the woods to Camden. From there he returned to East Sudbury in the Worcester area of Massachusetts where he remained during the remainder of the war.

In 1783, after the Revolutionary War had ended, John Brewer returned to New Worcester with his family. Upon his return he resurrected his mill and the family again set up housekeeping. His house was in bad shape and he constructed a frame house just below where the Second Congregational Church was later built*. He was made Deputy Sheriff and given command of the

military company of the plantation. In 1785 he was promoted to Colonel of the 5th regiment of Lincoln County and had a daughter (Martha). He joined with a number of the settlers to petition for a grant to form a township and was one of the two major players in the process. The original applications would have been nullified by the war. Because of the process involved, and other rival petitioners to the area, it was not until 1788 that the township was chartered. It was named Orrington and contained the area from present day Bucksport to present day Eddington and inland to present day Holden. The area was in Lincoln county, but later part of Penobscot county. During the first town meeting in 1788, John Brewer was the moderator. He resigned his commission in 1797. He had been an officer in the militia for over twenty years.

By 1800, John Brewer had accomplished much. He had been one of the original founders of a settlement in the present area, had developed the first sawmill on the river, had been instrumental in activities during the American Revolution and had been a major player in the formation of the township. It was in this year that Brewer became the first postmaster of the town, a position he held for eighteen years including six when the northern section of Orrington

was separated into the town which was named Brewer in honor of him. When the First Congregational Church was built that year, He and his family were at the first service.

At age 64, Martha died in 1808. After two years Brewer married Ruth Prescott, a widow, from Augusta. They remained married until she died in 1818. He married for the third time in 1819 to Abigail White of Bucksport.

Brewer retired from being postmaster in 1818 and the town was without a post office for ten years. Brewer died in 1826 at the age of 83 and is buried in Oak Hill Cemetery on land that he donated to the town. An article in a newspaper said of him:

"*WHEN HE DIED HE LEFT BEHIND HIM A PROSPEROUS TOWN, THE NUCLEUS OF THE PRESENT CITY, THE RECORDS OF A RUGGED MASTERFUL PROGRESSIVE LIFE, AND A TOMBSTONE IN THE CEMETERY"*

John Brewer built his home in this area. The white house behind the church was Possibly his home

**The exact location of John Brewer's permanent home is up to speculation.*

William Phillips writes "Several years ago when the church (Second Congregational Church on South Main Street) had a parking lot constructed, the workman found an old foundation deep beneath the ground there. As the land had been graded up through the years so as to deeply cover the foundation, this house would have been on a lower level than the church when the

church was erected, and would have been described as ‘;just below the church’ as it was by Captain Brewer’s great-granddaughter, Mrs. Lydia Swett, in 1932. Several older residents recall that the road sloped down from the church before the road was rebuilt. The Atlas of Penobscot County, Maine (1875) does not show this building so it had been removed or burned before that date. In his early history of Orrington and Brewer, written in 1820, Judge David Perham said that Col. John Brewer was living in the original frame house in 1820. He was a neighbor, having built his home in 1811 on the land where the Sargent’s later constructed their spacious home in 1847. Phillips also writes, “in 1907 when Dagney Erickson arrived in South Brewer from Oslo Norway, she lived in what is now the Black home (1976). She recollects playing in the lot next door, a quarter-acre level plot called ‘the flat’. In the southwest corner were an old foundation and caved in shallow well, which the local residents said were from the old John Brewer house.” These descriptions would indicate that the John Brewer house no longer exists.

In 2008, Charles Milan IV bought 609 South Main Street and believes, along with City Councilor Michael Celli and others in the community, that this was the original John Brewer house. The house was constructed around 1800, as determined by a historic preservationist on land that at the time was owned by Brewer. The house sits between the Second Congregational Church and the present day Sargent house and is definitely below the church.

The city of Brewer is treating 609 South Main Street as a historic landmark and the house is on the Brewer Register of Historic Places.

Brewer
During the 1800's

During the 1800s Brewer began to grow as a town and separated from Orrington in 1812. (It became a city in 1889). The skills of the inhabitants and the natural resources of the area allowed for the development of many important businesses. That combination of individual ability and available resources continues to this day. Until the advent of the automobile, the river was the major “road” and since the Penobscot River is one of the largest and most powerful rivers in Maine, it allowed for many travel and business opportunities. The inland of Maine was still an almost impenetrable forest and most traveling continued along the rivers and streams well into the 1800s. Originally, the streams emptying into the Penobscot River allowed the building of dams and power mills to create lumber from trees and grist from corn and grains. Later, larger dams would support power plants, paper mills, and textile mills. However, it was the small streams that originally provided the power. Also the river paved the way for log drives that began hundreds of miles north in the Great North Woods. These logs provided lumber for buildings, shipbuilding and shingle making.

The area .was originally known as Plantation Number 9, also New Worcester, then Orrington, and finally Brewer in 1812. It was basically a farming community. 100 acre parcels lined the river with about 1/8 mile river frontage and extending a mile inland. Settlers purchased the land and built their homes on or near the river, using the inland area for farming.

An example was the Chamberlain family. When Joshua Chamberlain Senior lost his shipping business because of the British embargo during the War of 1812, he moved from his home in Orrington to a 100 acre plot just north of today's Penobscot Bridge. He built a home near the river to raise his family. When his son, Joshua Chamberlain Junior, began his family he built a small cape style home on the acreage. He then built a larger home about a mile inland and took with him his family, including his son Lawrence. Lawrence, who later changed his name to Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, became a Major General in the Civil War and became one of Brewer's most famous citizens.

Other settlers had similar accounts of their lives and eventually the land began being sold, houses built increasingly inland and Brewer developed. Today, many house chain-of-deeds can be traced back to the

original settlers of the area.

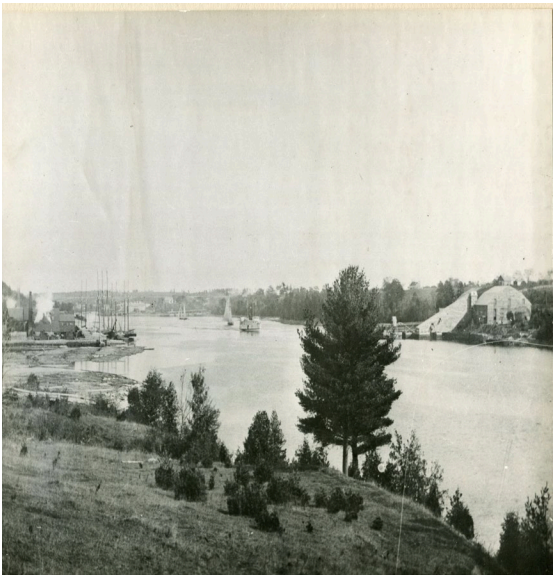
Farming remained a major part of Brewer's early history, but the Penobscot River was to provide an opportunity for the community to re-invent itself many times.

The Penobscot River has been part of the lives of riparian inhabitants for thousands of years. Native American Indians lived along its bank for centuries before the first white settlers arrived. They remain in the area to this day and the Penobscot Nation has its foundation on Indian Island near Old Town. Indian encampments remained along the Brewer shoreline until well into the 1800s. The Indians and settlers got along well and many were friends with the townspeople. Names like Molly Molasses and Joe Polis, Henry David Thoreau's guide, are legendary. Brewer native Manly Hardy and his daughter are examples. Manly Hardy was a fur trapper and worked with the Indians in his business enterprise. His daughter, Fannie Hardy Eckstorm, became nationally recognized for her nature studies and the writing of Indian lore. Many Indian and white children played together through the 19th century, including Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain.

During the 15th and 16th century explorers from England, Portugal and France charted

Penobscot Bay and sometimes sailed up the river searching for new land and passages to the West.

By the 18th century, the Penobscot River attracted fur trappers and those wishing to explore further inland. The Penobscot River took them far North to what is now known as the Great North Woods and discovered an almost unlimited supply of timber. That timber would develop the Bangor/Brewer area. Logs, harvested in the winter months upstream were released downriver on the spring freshet. Log drives provided the material to build buildings and ships.



The Penobscot River was the "highway"

The Penobscot River would continue play a major part in the history of Brewer. Shipbuilding became a major industry in the 1800s because of the timber available and ships became the commercial means of distributing local lumber products including ice, brick, lumber and paper.

Bangor became the lumbering capital of America during the second half of the 19th century. The deep harbor on the Bangor side provided an embarcadero for hundreds of sailing ships. The story is told that so many ships were in the water between Brewer and Bangor, that one could walk across the river on the ship decks and never get your feet wet. Brewer did not have the shorefront water depth of her sister city for docks and shipping, but Brewer's gentle sloping shoreline was perfect for the building and launching of ships.

Brewer Ship Building

Indeed, one of the major industries of the Brewer area in the second half of the 19th century was shipbuilding. These were the days of the great wooden sailing ships and Brewer was the center for building some of the best in America. “Rafts” of logs were driven down the river on the spring freshet to Brewer, sawed into lumber or made into masts and other spars then used in building ships in the many boatyards of Brewer.

The names of Brewer shipyards became legendary such as McGilvery, Dunning, Warren, Oakes, Doane, Barbour, Stetson and others. Even when most wooden ships were replaced by steel, Brewer produced some magnificent wooden steamboats, notably by Samuel Barbour. It was the time of lumber barons, famous captains, and the wealth of the area.

Brewer Shipyard

From about 1850 until almost 1920, Brewer had some of the finest shipyards in New England. Stimulated by the great amount of lumber available and the need of ships to carry prospectors off to the gold rush in California, numerous Brewer shipyards thrived. Ships of all sizes and configurations were built and carried lumber, ice, brick, hay, and other products around the world.

More sailing vessels were built in Maine during the 1800's than any other state. Maine builders developed skills in design and construction resulting in Maine's characteristic large vessels such as square rigged down-Easters and fore-and-aft rigged schooners. The Down-Easters made worldwide shipments while schooners carried cargo along the United States' east coast. Brewer was a major ship producing

city and was joined by others around Penobscot Bay so that about 3000 sailing ships were built on the bay between the late 1800's and early twentieth century. Brewer's "golden age" of shipbuilding was between about 1850 and 1920.

The building of wooden ships:

Building begins with a design. That design was carved on a half-hull model made from a number of boards (called lifts) pinned together. Once finished, the designer removed the pins and separated the model's lifts. He then measured these and drew the shape of the full hull size on the on the floor.

The keel is the backbone of the ship and provides strength. The stem piece which defines the bow and the sternpost on which the rudder is hung are bolted to the keel.

The ship's ribs or frames were made up of straight and curved timbers from the design pattern, cut to shape and set atop the keel. This formed the basic skeleton of the ship. A second keel, or keelson, was built over the keel, on top of the floor timbers of the frames for added strength.

Next the planking was bent lengthwise around the hull. When all the deck beams were in place the carpenters laid the deck

planking and interior planking.

Joiners built and finished the interior and exterior carpentry.
Fabricated masts, yards, and bowsprit were ancillary industries in brewer.

Then, riggers set up the ship's standing rigging and sails were made.

The ship was launched down rails that carried it into the water. A festive launching could attract hundreds of friends, neighbors and curious spectators.

Launching of the Horace E Monroe / 1919

Brewer Ice – Harvesting

Loading an ice house

A major industry in Brewer was the harvesting of ice from the Penobscot River. It reached its peak in the 1800's and before the days of refrigeration when Brewer provided ice to homes and businesses all along the east coast of America. There were nine massive ice houses that lined the river from the "ferry place" (near the present day Penobscot Bridge) to the "narrows" in Orrington.

Before there were refrigerators, food and supplies were kept cold by blocks of ice kept in an "ice box". This looked like a modern refrigerator, except that the ice was kept in a separate compartment. Because Maine has such cold winters and because the Penobscot River freezes, much of the ice used for the east coast of America was harvested in Brewer. Locally, the ice was kept in ice houses and delivered to homes and business using wagons that were pulled by horses.

When the river froze over, many men would harvest the ice. Horses pulled large scalpers to remove the snow from the ice. Then, horses would pull sharp tooth cutters to score the ice for men to cut off sections using saws and picks. These sections were floated through non-ice canals of water that were kept open. The blocks of cut ice could be floated to large chain elevators that moved them from the river to storage. Along the banks of the river were huge ice houses that stored thousands of tons of ice cut from the river. Later, it could be sent by sailing ships to where it was needed.

In summer, the blocks of ice would be sent down wooden "runs" from the ice house to waiting sailing ships. From there, the ships would deliver the ice to the southern part of the United States, and even to foreign

countries. Brewer ice was known far and wide as an excellent product.

In Brewer, Getchell Brothers was a company that delivered ice to homes and businesses. In the 1920's many Brewer high school students used to work the ice wagons during the summer. They might deliver up to 100 pounds of ice per load on their backs. The cart stopped at houses of those who had an "ice card" in the window. The iceman would stop, haul a large cake of ice to the back of the cart and chop off the desired amount. He would then swing the block over his black-rubber covered back and stride off to the customers house. There were always several children hovering at the back of the cart ready to pick up the pieces of ice that were lost in the process of shipping. A delightful treat on a hot day.

Brewer Brick Making

Pressing the clay into bricks

Brewer also took advantage of the clay soil that formed the foundation of its land. Brick making was a major industry of brewer during the middle to late 1800s and continued until the 1950s. It has been said that downtown Boston was built with Brewer bricks. Not only Boston, but many other cities along the east coast of America and beyond were the recipient of this excellent product. The standard of manufacture in the United States required that bricks would be “constructed of Brewer brick or equal”.

The topography of Brewer today is vastly different from what it was when Brewer became a town, separated from Orrington in 1812. At that time there were rolling hills and much of the community was located along the Penobscot River or in congregations around the area. Then it was discovered that the clay beneath those hills was perfect clay for making bricks and by 1850, Brewer had a major industry in full swing. After the Civil War (1861-1865) the brick making business again flourished and at one time there were probably 15 or 20 brick yards. Brooks Brick Company was the last one producing by 1920. But, Brooks Brick Company continued to make bricks until the 1950s.

The Brewer night sky glowed red. It was 1867. Fire was a constant threat at the time and entire towns had been devastated by such disasters. But, in this case the red glow indicated prosperity and the "firing" of a scove kiln of bricks. This was the brick making epoch in Brewer, Maine. Hundreds of molded bricks, made of clay and water, had been stacked in massive piles called a scove kiln. This scove kiln was built so that there were oven openings at the base and passageways for the heat to fire the bricks. Many cords of wood that had been logged in the area were stacked in the oven openings

and set afire. The fire was kept at a constant temperature and fired the bricks continuously for nine days. During that time the evening sky was awash in color because of the "burning of the kiln".

Brick is made of clay and water (and sometimes straw). Brewer clay traces its origins to the great glacial period of almost 50,000 years ago. Massive sheets of ice flowed south from the arctic, picking up rock and moving it along until the mass of ice, almost a mile thick in the Brewer area and weighing billions of tons, covered much of the North American continent. The weight of the ice pressed against the earth's crust and formed deep depressions that created today's topography. In addition, the weight of the ice ground the loose rock in much the way of a grinding machine. As temperatures warmed and the glaciers retreated, the ocean waters flooded the depressions. At one time the coast of Maine was 100 miles inland from its present location and Brewer was beneath the surface of the sea. In time, the ocean retreated and the crushed rock silt followed the flow. That silt formed the basis of Brewer's clay and became the basis of a major industry. Brewer brick was made from fine gray clay and had an indefinite lifetime.

Besides clay, it also takes water to make brick, up to 2000 gallons a day, and Brewer

had plenty of water. There was not only the river, but the streams feeding it. Much of the water for making brick came from a brook near what was then the Holyoke brickyard.

How did brick making in Brewer originate and why was the finished product so good that it became a national standard for the country. (The United States government requirements for brick was "Brewer brick or the equal"). The first criteria can be found in the topography. Brewer was a town (now a city) built on the banks of the Penobscot River and the river was the fountainhead of many Brewer industries, including brick making. The base of clay soil had the correct minerals and consistency to produce and exceptional product. Originally, Brewer's cache of topsoil covered clay, sloped vertically and away from the river banks. This allowed the soil to be cut on the vertical and the clay to be easily removed. But the brick yards, sometimes twenty operating at one time, terraced the slopes and created today's landscape. Picture Brewer in the early 1800s. A single dirt road ran along the river joined by small trails that wound up the slopes into the woods and pastures. Now, picture Brewer today with its many areas of level land that allow for such features as the railroad bed of the Bucksport branch of Maine Central Railroad line, sports fields, an auditorium,

and shopping areas.

Brewer also had the river. The Penobscot River is the second longest in Maine and longest in the contiguous state. It traverses several hundred miles into the Great North Woods. There, the extensive forests would find loggers cutting millions of board feet that were floated downstream on the spring freshet by river drivers. Bangor, the city across the river from Brewer, became the lumbering capital of the northeast and brought sailing ships which traveled the east coast and beyond. The sailing ships carried coal, pig iron and cement to the area .These ships had the capacity to transport heavy cargo and Bricks became a major product to fill their hold. The ship would sail with its hold filled with lumber, covered by 35,000 to 55,000 bricks, covered by bales of hay, and covered by a tarp to protect the cargo.

So, Brewer had the natural resources in the clay and the wood to fire it, along with the ships to transport it. An industry was born and flourished for 100 years. It provided the building material for many areas. Brewer brick has been shipped to Massachusetts, North Carolina, Florida, Texas, the West Indies and Newfoundland. After the great Boston fire in 1872, Brewer brick rebuilt much of the Beacon Hill area. There is also

evidence that Fort Sumter in South Carolina was built of Brewer brick.

What began as an enterprising 18th century settler's idea of scraping off the thin top soil of his land to reveal the clay beneath, then molding this clay into a finished product, became a major Brewer industry. This industry extended from its peak export era in the1850s through the 1950s. During the latter half of the 19th century there were about twenty yards operating simultaneously. Brickyards, including those owned by Gould, Dunn, Doherty, Gratian, Long, Farrington, and Holyoke, produced millions of bricks.
The last operating brick company, Brooks Brick was incorporated in 1906 and produced until 1956. Over the years they made many technological improvements inducing electrically driven machines making wire cut brick. Brooks Brick Company is still in Brewer, operating as a broker, and importing bricks from Maine, Massachusetts, Ohio, Canada and beyond.

Brick making is and always was a difficult labor. There are still a few citizens of Brewer that remember their teen-age years and working in a brickyard during the summer. The brick making season started in early May and continued through early October, with the first bricks ready to be

fired by July. Each worker has stories to tell of arduous labor. In 1886 William Burke made about 1,000,000 bricks of "the best quality". They sold for $5.50 per thousand. Burke employed eight to twelve men. These men received $30 to $50 a month, with board, despite the weather. The day began at 5AM and continued until 7 PM with three breaks for meals. Many of the laborers were Irish. It is important to remember that all of the process is hot "back-breaking" labor and we should have great respect for those who did it. Brick maker C.O. Farrington wrote a letter in 1859....."Sirs: Having found from experience that turning bricks by hand is a long and tedious operation,. I have constructed an implement for doing the work to which I would respectfully call your attention. It is substantially built of the best materials and weighs less than five pounds. This edger was tried by several manufacturers this last season who gave it their unqualified approval. It does the work well and quickly. In one-half hour a person can learn to edge bricks three times as fast as by hand. Your orders are respectfully submitted." ....Besides the "edger", the Brewer Brick Cart originated in Brewer to make work easier. The cart had four wheels with straight axles. It was balanced for easier transport and had a drop-down front that allowed bricks to run out.

Brick making begins with the scraping and removal of the top soil to reveal clay below. This clay is plowed manually or by horse, piled, and transported by hand cart to a very large mixing tub. There it is mixed with water (and sometimes straw) until the proper consistency is obtained. This mixing was often done by horse power in which the animal walked the outside perimeter of the tub harnessed to a series of poles and a large paddle that rotated in the tub. The mixing process could take hours, but the thick slurry was then able to be siphoned into molds and pressed into a brick shape. These molds were transported by cart to open areas in the brick yard where they were carefully laid out on the ground in such a way as to be dried by the sun. Thousands of bricks would fill the yard. When the bricks dried they would be stored in covered sheds until they could be "fired". When there were sufficient bricks, they would be stacked in an open area to form a scove kiln. The ground was leveled and sand spread over the area. Bricks were wheeled to the site and thrown to the "setter", a man who placed the bricks, four at a time. The setter wanted to catch them at the exact location they were to be placed on the kiln, as they had to be placed correctly to stand up after being fired. The setter wore mitts as the brick could tear the skin off a workman's hands. After the kiln was built, the scoving was put

on the four sides. Scoving consisted of clay plastered on the outside, with sand in a box-like arrangement at the bottom forming the base for the scoving. A scove kiln could be a stack of 250,00 to 900,000 bricks, built several layers high, with open passages to allow uniform heating and an outside opening in the shape of a arched oven. Thirty arches made a million bricks. Wood was placed in the opening and pushed along the passages then set afire. The fire would require hundreds of cords of wood over the nine day burn. When there were seventeen brickyards they could use about 3000 cords per year.

Laborers would stack the bricks, cut the wood needed for the two weeks that the bricks were fired and constantly maintain the fire to a consistent temperature. The keeper of the fire was a highly trained and capable employee, because the temperature, which could reach 2000 degrees Fahrenheit, had to be precisely regulated so that all the bricks in the scove would be heated the same. At the end of nine days the fire was extinguished, the bricks allowed to cool and then stored for transport.

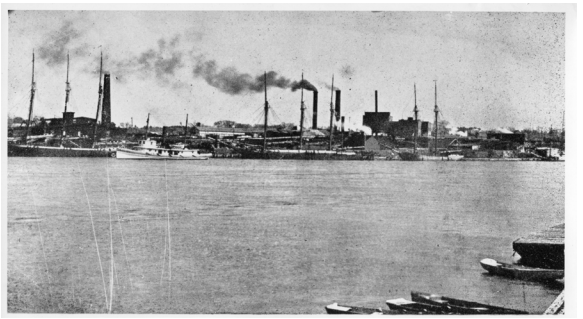
The brick making history of Brewer has ended now. The layers of clay have been harvested and supplanted by other industries. It is a matter of re-inventing the

community based upon circumstances and resources at the time. But the legacy of these brick makers live on. Millions of Brewer Bricks can be found in thousands of buildings and hundreds of locations. It is a testament to those men that helped shape the future of their town and we salute them. As local historian Mildred Thayer wrote, "The brick making equipment is now silent, the brick cart stands empty and disconsolate, and the sky no longer glows with the flames of the burning kilns."

Brewer Paper-Production

By the end of the 19th century the large industries that had been at the essence of Brewer's economy were in decline. There were still small businesses and industries, but the boom times were over. Brewer, however, has always been able to maintain itself in the world. Now, it looked to paper.

Eastern Mill produced paper from rags and later from wood pulp and that anchored the City for many years. In the twentieth century, the paper industry defined Brewer, specifically south Brewer



Eastern Paper mill at turn of century

For more than a century, the plume of smoke rising from the paper mill in South Brewer meant prosperity and stability for the community. It represented the production of nationally recognized fine-quality paper product that supported and sustained

hundreds of employees.

But, the mill was more than a business, more than an industry, more than a livelihood. The paper mill in South Brewer created a community culture that defined the neighborhood.

During the 1800's, Brewer was a place that took advantage of its natural resources and location by developing major industries such as brick-making, ice-harvesting and ship building.

By the late 1800s, though, the natural resources for brick clay had all but been depleted. A new invention, the refrigerator, replaced ice boxes, along with the need for Penobscot River ice harvesting. And steel ships replaced the wooden craft that had been built from the trees of the Great North Woods.

Brewer needed to re-invent itself and the paper industry proved to be the impetus. Fred Ayer was a man of vision. In the late 1800s he bought a saw mill that had been built in Brewer along the banks of the Penobscot River, near the Segeunkedunk stream. He subsequently increased the capacity of the saw mill until it was the largest in New England.

The wood waste product of the saw mill was originally used as heat for the business, but Ayer realized the greater value for the wood lay in the production of sulfite pulp, the raw

material for paper making.
In 1889 he started to produce pulp from wood and rags. His company, first known as Eastern Corporation and then Eastern Manufacturing Company, entered the paper making business in 1896. It began with one paper making machine, but in a few years two more were added.
By 1916, the saw mill was shut down and paper making became the focus of operations. South Brewer had access to an immense amount of water from the Penobscot River and unlimited wood from the Maine forests. It was clear-the future was in paper making.
Paper is made from a source of fiber. Originally, bales of rags were shipped to the South Brewer Mill, then cut and sorted. The rags were placed in open barrels of chemical to break down the fiber. It was hard hazardous work. Women would stand for hours performing this process, inhaling chemical fumes and working with caustic liquid.
Eventually, lumber replaced rags as a source for pulp. The grinding, or mechanical, process of making wood pulp originated in Maine at the Brewer facilities. Logs were cut, trimmed of bark and chipped. Then the wood chips were fed into a large pressure cooker, called a digester, along with water, chemicals and heat.
This separated the wood fiber from waste

materials. The cooked pulp stock was cleaned and bleached, then sent into a rotating screen cylinder which removed water and chemicals, while retaining the milky pulp. The pulp was dried in drying cylinders, then folded and rolled.

From pulp comes paper. The paper pulp was first processed in a beater, then mixed with water and beaten in order to break the pulp into fibers. It was then transported to a refining engine which unified the fiber length; and a screening process which removed the last waste particles.

The beaten material was fed into the paper making machine. Here, the thickness of the paper was determined. The liquid material moved across a screen to align the fibers, and finally sent across steam filled dryer rolls.

The end product was a roll of paper which could be shipped. In the Brewer paper mill, the paper was cut into sheets, wrapped, sealed, and transported to customers.

During the twentieth century, Eastern Manufacturing Company -later named Eastern Fine Paper- became the important industry in Brewer.

In 1914 Eastern merged with Katahdin Pulp and Paper Company in Lincoln, located 50 miles upstream along the Penobscot River. Eastern Manufacturing would eventually receive all their pulp from Lincoln and use it to produce a high grade paper product in

Brewer. Eastern continued operating through the Depression and World War II. During the war, paper was produced for the government and the mill ran 24 hours a day, a time schedule that continued for much of its existence.

In 1958 Eastern, along with Lincoln Pulp and Paper, was acquired by Standard Packaging Corporation. Ten years later, in March of 1968, the mill was closed and Brewer was devoid of its major employer. It was devastating, but wouldn't last long, thanks to the support of the community,

Local residents raised capital to restart their respective mills in Brewer and in Lincoln. In all, 982 people would buy the bonds necessary to finance the operation, and in October of 1968 Eastern was back in operation.

The mill recruited a management team from former Eastern leaders and rehired many of the workers laid off in March. The mill would operate under the name of Eastern Fine Paper Inc. for the remainder of its existence.

In 1969, E. B. Eddy Ltd. Of Canada purchased Eastern Fine paper. Twenty years later the mill would be purchased by Joseph Torras of Presco, Inc., the parent company of Lincoln Pulp and Paper. The mills were once again under the same corporate umbrella. Eastern Fine Paper continued to produce an extremely high quality product

until it closed its doors in 2004.

It is difficult to over-state the impact that the Mill had on South Brewer and the city as a whole. It was a daily part of the lives of thousands of people providing not only employment, but a culture and a way of life. Eastern Fine Paper became nationally renowned for its paper quality in large part because of the experience and loyalty of its employees.

A 1930 Brewer Development Commission report stated that more than 400 of its employees had been with the company for more than 10 years and many more with lengths of service from 25 to 40 years. Some had worked at the mill for over fifty years.

The community surrounding the paper mill in South Brewer was in many ways an autonomous one. There were five grocery stores, two public schools, 3 bars, a Catholic school, three gas stations, a drug store and a department store. There was a Catholic church and a Congregational church.

The population was a melting pot of Canadian Catholics, originally from the Province of Quebec, and Protestants, often from the Northeastern section of the United States. It was a working-class community that lived, worked, worshipped and played together, with the paper mill as the unifying factor.

For generations, this community made due with the opportunities available and developed a work ethic that remained ingrained all of their lives.

If you grew up in South Brewer during this time, you often had little social contact with the people in North Brewer until high school. At that time, most students would attend the only high school in Brewer or, if Catholic, could attend a parochial high school in Bangor.

Upon graduation, most young men (and many young women) worked at the mill. It was an easy career decision for most. There was a good salary and opportunity for these graduates. Work was available and there was a strong belief in the permanence of the industry.

Working at Eastern Fine Paper was a lifelong career for many people. The union was the voice of the employee. Originally, United Paper Workers and later United Steel Workers negotiated salary and conditions. Employees were compensated for the type of job performed, the length of time on the job and the number of hours worked. The closing of Eastern Fine Paper Company in 2004 was a major economic blow to the city of Brewer. The community surrounding the South Brewer mill was interdependent and the impact on ancillary businesses was significant.

Today, a new company, Cianbro Constructor

Modular Manufacturing Company, occupies the land once owned by the paper mill. Cianbro constructs metal building modules in Brewer that are placed on barges to be transported down the Penobscot River, then shipped to seaports wherever they are needed, all over the world.

It is the kind of business that demonstrates the same kind of visionary creativity that spawned the paper industry in Brewer and helped support the city for decades. The plume of steam that defined the skyline of Brewer for so many years is extinguished, but the quality and character of its employees and the community that supported them is alive and well.

Fred Ayer, who brought paper-making to Brewer more than a century ago, certainly would have been proud.

Eastern Paper Mill

The 1900s and 2000s

During the early 1920s the trolley was an important Brewer mode of transportation

For over 100 years the paper mill in South Brewer provided a major portion of Brewer's economy and defined the 20th century for the area. The paper mill spawned its own community and South Brewer became a cultural and social area quite different from North Brewer.

The south Brewer community provided schools, churches, businesses, housing and entertainment for a society that was indelibly bound with the paper mill. North Brewer was culturally and socially separate, with its own schools, churches, businesses and housing. Citizens of north Brewer were often business and professional people. It is difficult to imagine a small city the size of Brewer so fragmented, but it was. North Brewer citizens shopped along the North Main Street area as well as crossing the bridge to Bangor. It is, of course, true that some people would have taken the trolley (1900 to 1939) to work the mill or crossed the Bangor/Brewer Bridge for employment, but generally the north Brewer citizens were a separate community. As stated above, many children's first contact with the "north" or "south" came when all the children had to attend the same High School.

With the closing of the mill, the basic

economy of Brewer changed. About this time a myriad of large and small businesses were being developed on outer Wilson Street and Eastern Maine Healthcare (now Northern Light) built an architecturally beautiful building on Whiting Hill that became their corporate headquarters and Lafayette Cancer Center. Also, Brewer became a bedroom community for the business community of Bangor. Meanwhile, the shopping area on outer Wilson Street became a destination for Bangor shoppers.

With the closing of the paper mill, the mill area was purchased by Cianbro Corporation, one of the most successful businesses of its kind the country. Cianbro is involved in many construction projects throughout the United States. At their Brewer facility, the company manufactures large metal modules which can be moved and floated down the Penobscot River. From Penobscot Bay they can be transported anywhere needed. This is a unique concept and Cianbro employs workers from all over the area. It is not a south Brewer company as the paper mill was, but offers employment to the area and beyond.

The Penobscot River, which had been severely polluted by the effluence of cities, towns and paper mills was placed under the

Clean Water Act. All effluence now had to be processed before discharge and the river has once again become a clean waterway. With the closing of the paper mills along the river and the removal of many dams, the river now supports marine life. River protection groups worked to make the river an environmentally friendly place that now support fish in the river, kayaks and canoes, along with pleasure craft.

The return of a clean river provided the impetus for Bangor to develop its waterfront with a casino, hotels, restaurants and a waterfront pavilion that attracts national entertainment. Brewer also seized the opportunity and has developed its own beautiful waterfront trail with restaurants and local breweries.

The development of the Brewer waterfront was a major component of the 2015 *Brewer Comprehensive Report.* This document provides a ten year vision for Brewer and is a blueprint of the exciting future of Brewer, Maine.

Written by David Hanna, March 2019

For an electronic version of this history of Brewer see our web site *www.brewerhistoricalsociety.org*

Brewer Historical Society
PO Box 602
199 Wilson Street, Brewer, Maine 04412
www.brewerhistoricalsociety.org
Facebook: Brewer Historical Society
E-mail: brewerhistoricalsociety@gmail.com

Selected References:

Thayer, Mildred and Ames, Mrs. Edward, "Brewer Orrington Holden Eddington, History and Families" Brewer 150th Anniversary Committee, L.H. Thompson Press, 1962.

"Colonel John Brewer, founder of Brewer / A Bicentennial Effort"
By William and Lorraine Phillips,

"Bricks in Brewer Town: The Enterprising People Across the River Digs Wealth out of Clay Bricks", Industrial Journal, October 15, 1856

Brooks, Harrison, "50,000 Years ago Ice Sheet Mile High over Bangor", Bangor Daily News, September 14, 1956

Shaw, Richard, Images of America: Brewer, Acadia Publishing, 2000

Kenney, Howard, "The Brick Story, Unpublished

Wyman, Gerry, A Pictorial History of Brewer, Maine, Addendum to article on brick making. From discussion with Francis Muldoon

Hanna, David, Articles regarding brick production, and paper production were first published in "Memories of Maine" by David Hanna for the Brewer Historical Society, 2015

Brewer's Comprehensive Plan is available from the City of Brewer, 2015

Dedicated to the Citizens of Brewer